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Ken Kesey, W.D. Snodgrass Interviews
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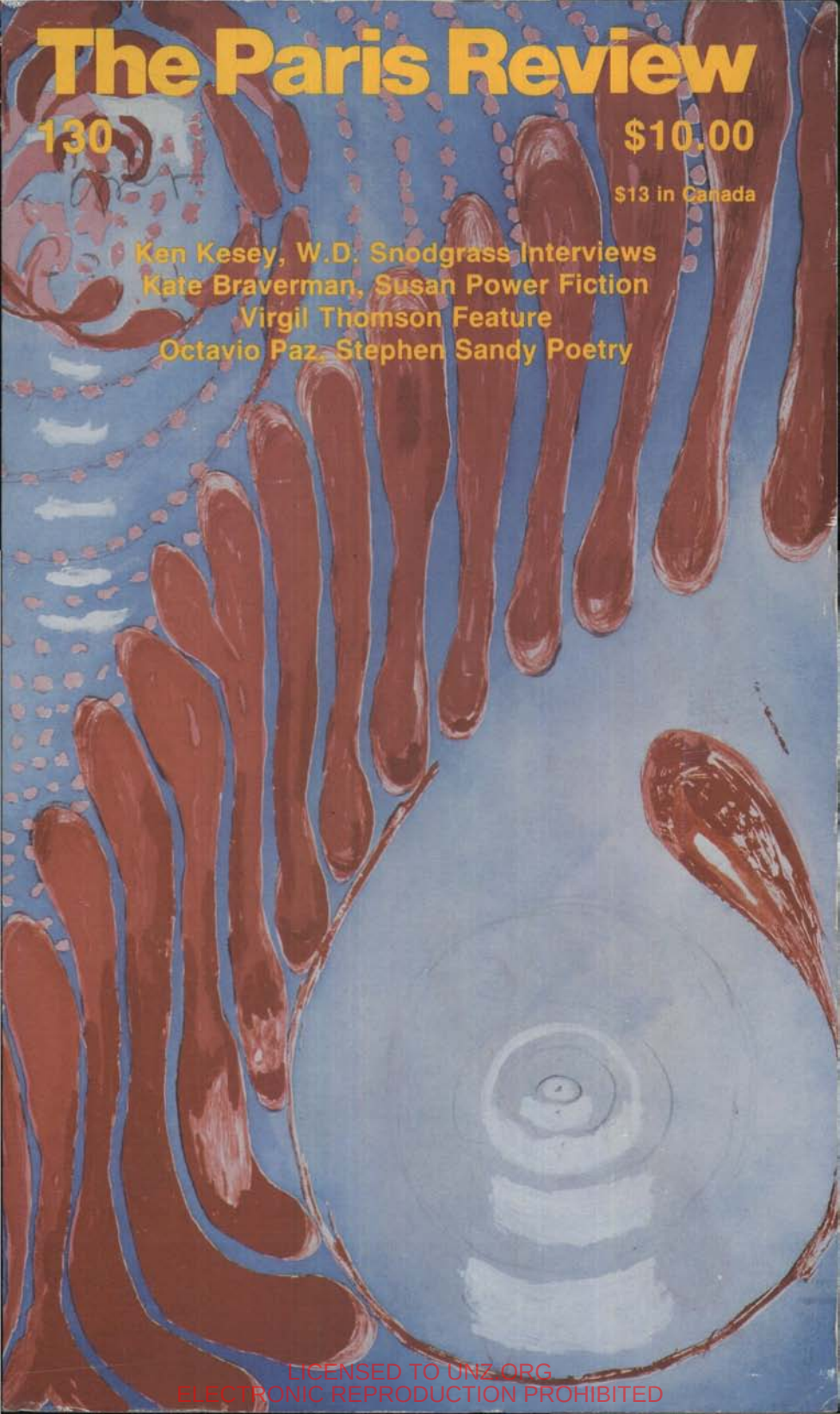

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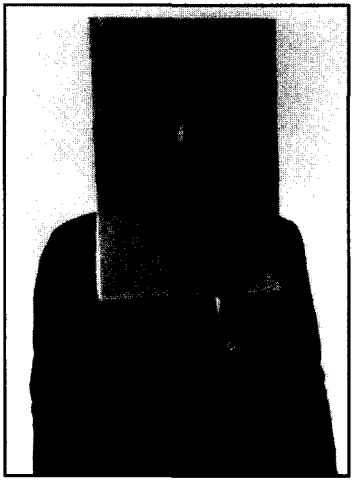

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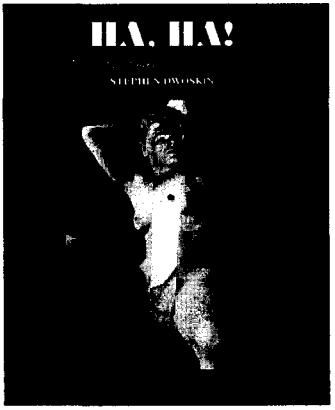

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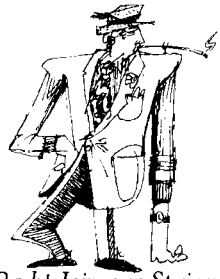

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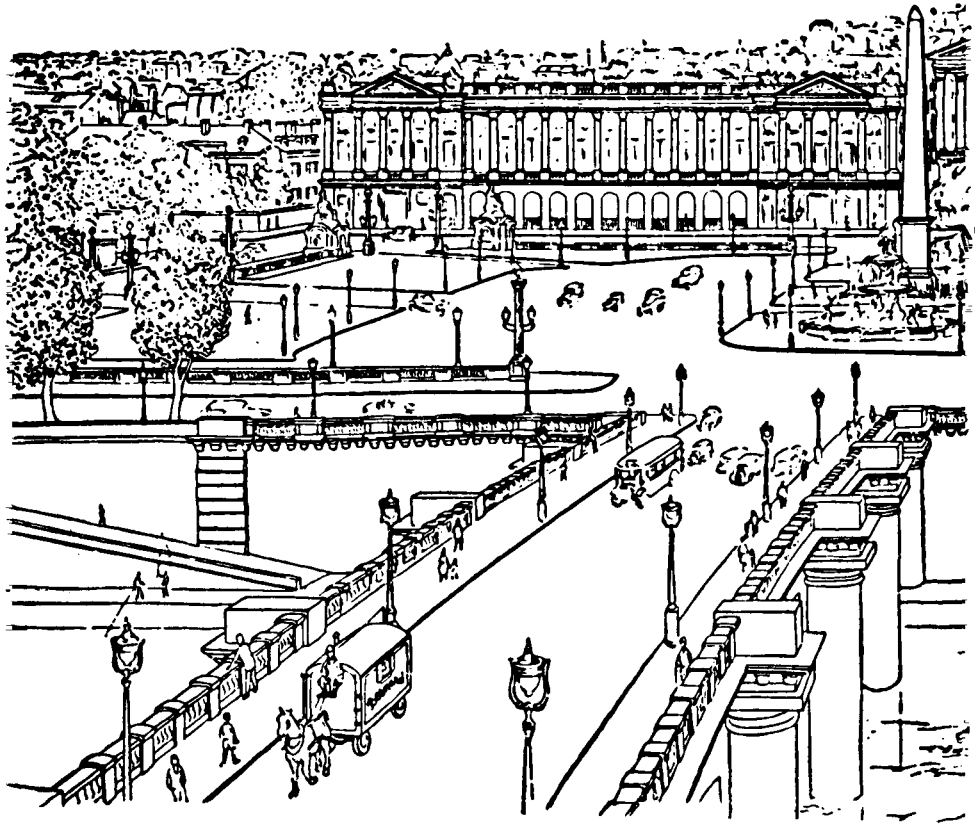

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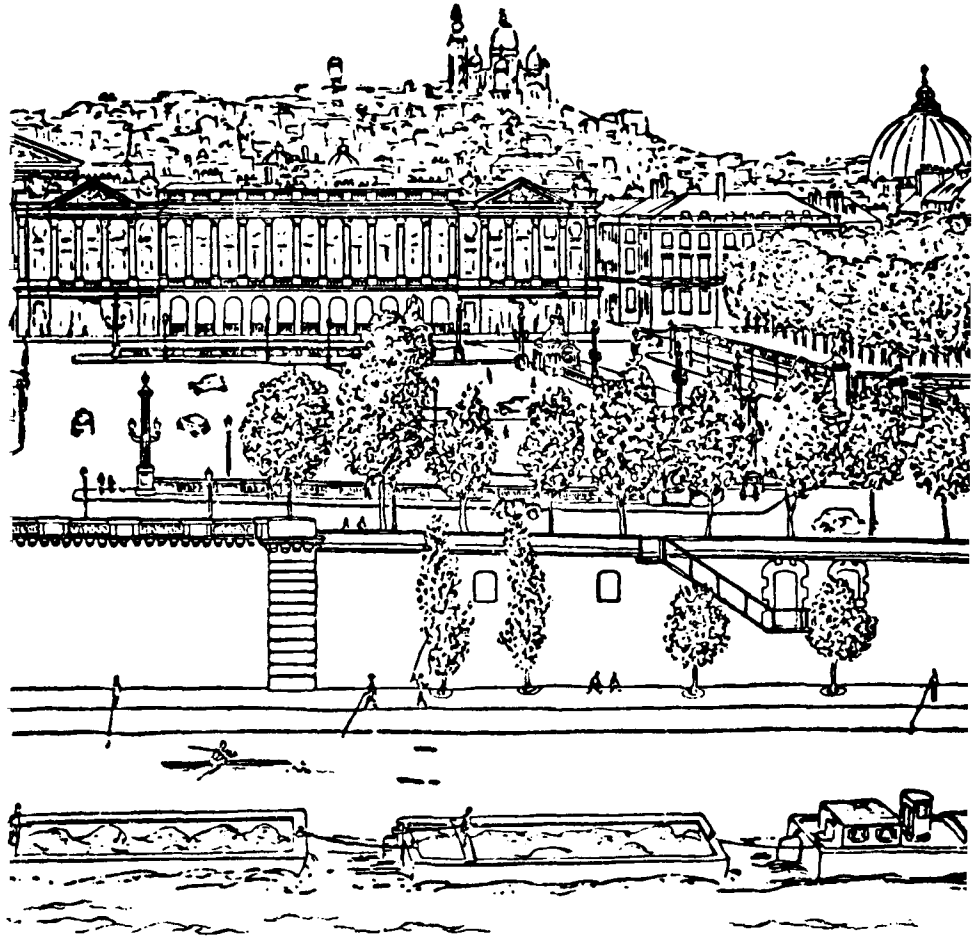

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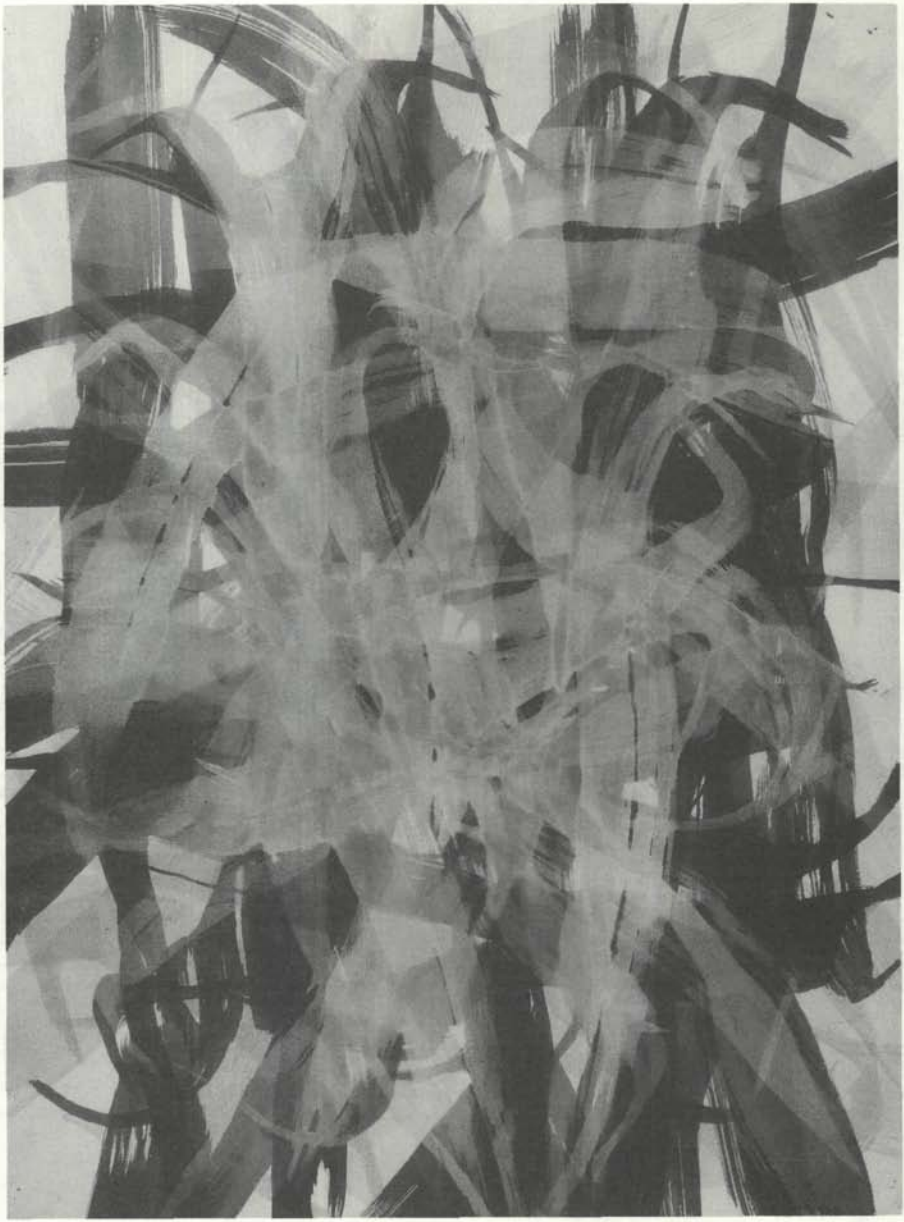

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Soliloquio

Octavio Paz

• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •

fluye tenaz entre sombras caídas,
cava túneles, taladra silencios,
insiste, corre bajo mi almohada,
roza mis sienes, recubre mis párpados
con otra piel impalpable hecha de aire,
sus naciones errantes, sus tribus soñolientas
recorren las provincias de mi cuerpo,
pasa y repasa bajo puentes de huesos,
se desliza por mi oreja izquierda,
se derrama por mi oreja derecha,
asciende por mi nuca,
da vueltas y vueltas en mi cráneo,
vaga por la terraza de mi frente,
suscita las visiones, las disipa,
uno a uno con manos de agua que no moja
borra mis pensamientos, los esparce,
negro oleaje, marea de pulsaciones,
rumor de agua que avanza a tientas
repitiendo la misma sílaba sin sentido,
oigo su desvarío sonámbulo
perderse en serpeantes galerías de ecos,
vuelve, se aleja, vuelve,
por mis desfiladeros
interminablemente se despeña
y no acabo de caer
y caigo
interminablemente en su caída,
caigo sin moverme,
caigo
con un rumor de agua que cae,
caigo en mí mismo y no me toco,

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Soliloquy

translated by Eliot Weinberger

• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •

persistent, flowing through fallen shadows,
excavating tunnels, drilling silences,
insisting, running under my pillow,
brushing past my temples, covering my eyelids
with another, intangible skin made of air,
its wandering nations, its drowsy tribes
migrate through the provinces of my body,
it crosses, re-crosses under the bridges of my bones,
slips into my left ear, spills out from my right,
climbs the nape of my neck,
turns and turns in my skull,
wanders across the terrace of my forehead,
conjures visions, scatters them,
erases my thoughts one by one
with hands of unwetting water,
it evaporates them,
black surge, tide of pulse-beats,
murmur of water groping forward
repeating the same meaningless syllable,
I hear its sleepwalking delirium
losing itself in serpentine galleries of echoes,
it comes back, drifts off, comes back,
endlessly flings itself
off the edges of my cliffs,
and I don't stop falling
and I fall
endlessly in its falling,
I fall without moving,
I fall
with a murmur of falling water,
I fall through myself without touching myself,

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caigo en mi centro,
lejos de mí, lejos,
estoy aquí y no sé dónde está aquí,
¿quí día es hoy?
hoy es hoy,
siempre es hoy y yo soy una fecha
perdida entre el antes y el después,
el sí y el no, el nunca y el siempre,
el ahora mismo y su solo de flauta
al filo del vacío,
las geometrías
suspendidas en un espacio sin tiempo,
cubos, pirámides, esferas, conos
y los otros juguetes de la razón en vela,
hechuras de cristal, luz, aire: ideas,
en el abstracto cielo de la mente
fijas constelaciones,
ni vivas ni muertas,
hilos de araña y baba cristalina,
tejidos del insomnio destejidos al alba,
río de pensamientos que no pienso: me piensan,
río, música que anda, delta de silencio,
callada catarata, marea contra mis tímpanos,
el deseo y sus ojos que tocan,
sus manos que miran,
su alcoba que es una gota de rocío,
su cama hecha de un solo reflejo,
el deseo,
obelisco tatuado por la muerte,
la cólera en su casa de navajas,
la duda de cabeza triangular,
el remordimiento, su bisturí y su lente,
las dos hermanas, fatiga y desvelo,
que esta noche pelean por mi alma,
todos, uno tras otro,
se despeñan,
apagado murmullo de ojos bajos,

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I fall through my center,
far from me, far off,
I am here and I don't know where here is,
what day is today?
today is today,
it is always today and I am a date
lost between before and after,
yes and no, never and always,
this very moment and its flute solo
at the edge of the void,
geometries
suspended in a timeless space,
cubes, pyramids, spheres, cones
and the other toys of sleepless reason,
shapes made of crystal, light, air:
ideas,
in the abstract sky of the mind,
fixed constellations,
neither living nor dead,
spider threads and crystalline drivel,
woven by insomnia, unwoven at dawn,
river of thoughts I don't think, that think me,
river, itinerant music, delta of silence,
soundless cataracts, tide at my eardrums,
desire and its eyes that touch,
its hands that see,
its bedroom that is a drop of dew,
its bed made from a single shaft of light,
desire,
obelisk tattooed by death,
rage in its house of knives,
doubt with its triangular head,
remorse with its scalpel and lens,
the two sisters, fatigue and restlessness,
that battle tonight for my soul,
all of them, one after the other,
fling themselves over,
hushed mumble of downcast eyes,

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confuso rumor de agua hablando a solas,
no, no es un rumor de agua
sino de sangre,
va y viene incesante por mis arterias,
yo soy su cárcel y ella mi carcelera,
no, no es la sangre,
son los días y los años,
las horas muertas y este instante
todavía vivo,
tiempo cayendo
interminablemente en sí mismo,
oigo mi respiración, mi caída, mi despeño,
estoy tendido al lado de mí mismo,
lejos, lejos,
estoy tendido allá lejos,
¿dónde está el lado izquierdo,
dónde el derecho, el norte dónde está?
inmóvil, mecido por la ola sin cuerpo,
soy un latido, un parpadeo
en un repliegue del tiempo,
el instante se abre y se cierra,
una claridad indecisa despunta
¿viene o se va?
¿regresa o se aleja?
ecos de pasos, procesión de sombras
en el teatro de los ojos cerrados,
manar de latidos,
redoble de sílabas
en la cueva del pecho,
salmodias
en el templo de vértebras y arterias,
¿es la muerte que llega?
¿es el día,
el inflexible cada día?
hoy ya no es hoy,
me arrastra un río negro
y yo soy ese río
¿qué hora es,
cruel reloj, reloj sin horas?

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blurred murmur of water talking to itself,
no, it is not the murmur of water
but of blood,
it comes and goes incessantly through my veins,
I am its prison, and it my jailer,
no, it is not blood,
it is the days and years,
the dead hours and this instant
that is still alive,
time falling
endlessly in itself,
I hear my breathing, falling, hurling down,
I am stretched out alongside myself,
far off, far,
I am stretched out there, far off,
where is my left side, my right,
which way is north?
unmoving, rocked by the wave with no body,
I am a heartbeat, a blink of an eye
in a crease of time,
the moment opens and closes,
a hazy clarity shoots across,
is it coming or going?
does it return or drift off?
echoes of footsteps, procession of shadows
in the theater of closed eyes,
torrent of heartbeats,
drumroll of syllables
in the cave of my chest,
chorus of psalms
in the temple of vertebrae and veins,
is it death arriving?
is it day,
the inflexible every day?
today is no longer today,
a black river drags me along
and I am that river
what time is it,
cruel clock, clock with no hours?

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Snakes

Susan Power

Father La Frambois was anxious to baptize me in the Missouri River, to change my name from *Čuwignaka Duta*, or Red Dress, to the holier appellation, Esther. He was an energetic old man and vivid in color; his cheeks so brightly red they looked slapped, and his eyes a dark blue like the night sky, although sometimes dimming to black in moments of anger. I would not be coaxed into the Missouri, not even to repay him for the hours he spent teaching me to read, to write, recite, to form my thoughts into plain, desolate English until I could speak in terms more lovely than the priest. He bribed me with stories of heaven and eternal life, told me it was within my power to transform my soul from a black crusted thing into a white snow goose with silken wings. When that failed, he bribed me with sugar and silver crosses for me to wear dangling from my earlobes. I wore the crosses to test their potency, expected Christ to whisper his message directly into my ears. And when he was silent, I knew that the silver crosses were really symbols of the morning star, the same image we painted on our buckskin clothes. But I did not tell Father

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La Frambois, because it isn't polite to point out to an elder person that he is mistaken.

The missionary priest traveled alone throughout Dakota Territory, perched on a tall American horse that routinely charged our ponies and had to be led through the village with a blanket covering its head. The priest arrived year after year in the fall, noticed first by *Šunka Gleška*, Spotted Dog, who would race in circles around my father's lodge, occasionally pausing to howl. This clever companion was a pumpkin-colored dog with wiry fur and white speckles on his muzzle. He could respond to commands made in either Dakota or English, which greatly impressed my father. Once alerted by Spotted Dog, the village would turn out to welcome Father La Frambois, moving towards him like an errant wave from the river. We became accustomed to his annual arrival at our winter camp, familiar with the heavy black dress he wore falling awkwardly from his crooked shoulders; he resembled a turkey vulture with broken wings. He would remain with us until spring, drill me in my lessons and study my careful penmanship. He taught me to write the name Esther so that I would be ready to claim it once I had saved my soul, and although I refused the name, I liked to draw it; managing the ink so that it would flow gracefully without bleeding, and fashioning the "E" with dramatic flourishes, curved into the shape of a lush bear heavy with winter fat.

Perhaps I should have told the Jesuit directly: "I will never be the convert you desire. I am Red Dress, beloved of snakes." I know he would have found that statement foolish. He had no patience for spirits, dreams or animal totems, despite his self-confessed ability to transform wine into blood and a crisp wafer of bread into living flesh. That is why, although I listened quietly to his stories and studied Scriptures, translated his teachings into the Dakota language so that my curious father, Bear Soldier, and his seven sub-chiefs could decide for themselves the merit of Father's words, I never told the priest my own legend.

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My mother was Black Moon, the lady whose long features threatened to slip off her face until she smiled, beautifully, lifting them back into place. In her care I came to know myself, and her memories of me became my own. I recalled being set out to play on a vast buffalo hide, then, made drowsy by the sun, tipping over and sliding into sleep. My mother was visiting with friends a short distance away, her hands busy with quillwork. She didn't notice the two rattlesnakes gliding onto my infant's shadow, where they coiled together, joining me in a nap. I remember their chalky smell and graceful movements, the feel of their cool glossy skin. As I slept I clutched a serpent by the tail and shook it like a baby's toy. The rattler never struck, was patient with me even when my mother and her friends hovered, horrified, above his twisting head.

"Don't move," the women whispered to each other. They pulled my mother back and made her sit on the ground. "Look at how they are claiming her," one woman said. Eventually my grasping fist released the viper, and he and his companion left the buffalo hide. I think I cried for them to return, but my mother crushed me into her arms, and I grabbed her braids, thinking they were black snakes.

"That one charms the snakes," people have whispered all my life, but they have it wrong. The snakes charmed me.

The final winter of my friendship with the priest was 1864 by his reckoning. Father La Frambois was determined to impress, to introduce us to that deity he called the True God. He told me to inform the village crier that he would be saying mass on the prairies.

"The vaulting sky is my cathedral," he fairly shouted at me. His arm swept the horizon. "Everyone must attend. Everyone must be given this opportunity to hear the word of God and discover the life everlasting."

His skin was slick with the heat of his emotion; I thought of melting tallow. Pity pricked my heart, and when I opened my mouth to tell the crier what Father had said, scheming

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words emerged. "Tomorrow Father La Frambois will dance for us on the grass." It was a minor deception I felt would bring the people rushing, curious, to the level floodplain Father had selected for his impromptu church. Even the older warriors—dispassionate, believing they had seen everything worth noticing in the world—would surely turn out for such a spectacle.

"You will be my voice," Father said that evening, ignorant of my treason. "You will be the instrument of your people's salvation." His bright cheeks were flames; he looked ready to burn.

I had often wondered why the priest chose me for his pupil, an unwilling acolyte. Why not my younger brother or little sister? Why not a patient child whose mind was untroubled, so rarely did she question what she heard? I asked him now, "Father, why am I your voice?"

I received the answer that is no answer: "It is God's will."

The next afternoon four hundred people assembled on the level plain to witness Father's dance. He received everyone—even the crawling infants—with a handshake, and made the people stand in straight rows. "These are pews," he said. When everyone was settled, he faced the orderly group and began to speak: "Welcome to your grass church. The Lord is all around you—let Him into your heart. You have been a stubborn people, a great challenge to me. I have come this year, and in past years, because I care about you, and your souls are in jeopardy."

Father paused, waiting for me to translate. I told my tribesmen: "Welcome, friends. The past winters we spent together have been very pleasant. I've learned a great deal from these visits and I have respect for you. You are a strong people."

The warriors nodded, breathing, "*Oha(n)*," and several of the women trilled their tongues to make the *wičağalata* cry of approval. "They say you are making sense," I told the priest. He spoke for an hour about the necessity of cleansing our spirits until I began to think of the soul as a garment I could rinse in the river and then spread on a smooth rock to dry in the sun. Mind you, when I translated inaccurately it was not

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out of carelessness or spite. Father was tactless but he had been a friend to me. It was loyalty that led me to overlook his indelicate remarks and speak in a voice of my own.

All during Father's sermon the rows held. No one faltered in the chill air or stamped his feet. None of the children squawked. Afterwards, Father removed his ornate thurible from a velvet-lined casket and lit the incense. He paraded in front of the patient families, swinging the thurible up and back, and then in a full dramatic circle. The cloying scent of burning incense blew into their faces. He marched past the people, behind them, surrounding them with smoke. Spotted Dog trailed after him, imitating the priest's dignified pace and inspecting his tracks with something like suspicion. I moved to signal the dog but never completed the gesture. A tall figure lunged into the neat lines Father referred to as pews. The intruder clapped his hands and doubled over, his shoulders shaking with laughter.

"*Šunka Wakan Wanaği*," people murmured. They were whispering his name, Ghost Horse. The community pulled back and watched as he rolled on the ground like a mad colt; he brayed with laughter and tore the grass with his white teeth. Father La Frambois moved to stand over Ghost Horse, the thurible still rocking in his hands.

"The poor boy is deranged," Father said.

"No, he is *heyo'ka*. He dreamed of the thunderbirds," I tried to explain.

"Stop there, stop there!" Smoke coiled from the thurible like pale ribbon snakes dancing on their tails. I couldn't see Father's face but I could hear his tongue clicking sharply in his mouth. "I thought we were progressing. I believed you were beyond all this."

Father La Frambois trudged back to his guest lodge, his shoulders collapsed in defeat. Spotted Dog trotted behind him, snapping at the threads of smoke and coughing whenever he swallowed the rich vapor.

The people quickly dispersed, disappointed with the program, until only Ghost Horse remained, thrashing at my feet.

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He quieted, sat up and dusted his graceful arms. White streaks of lightning painted his arms and legs, and his face was striped with vertical lines in black and white. A bunch of switchgrass was tied to his forelock, hiding eyes I knew were clear and black as polished buffalo horns. A cold wind was blowing from the northwest, the place winter came from, but Ghost Horse didn't shiver. He fanned his face and complained of the scorching heat.

After dreaming of the giant thunderbirds who could shoot lightning from their glimmering eyes, Ghost Horse had become *heyo'ka*, a sacred clown. His behavior was perverse: he wept at social dances, laughed at solemn events, shivered in the hot summer sun and sweltered in frigid temperatures. He rushed into battle ahead of other warriors, treating war as play, and he always said the opposite of what he meant. I sensed he was lonely, burdened by his powerful dream, which obligated him to appease the thunder-beings through public humiliation.

Ghost Horse stood and shook his limbs as if to rouse himself. I stared at the ground, polite, demure, my legs shaking beneath my dress. "I disappointed the priest," I finally said. "He doesn't understand the way we do things."

Ghost Horse was silent a long moment. Then he told me: "That man understands everything."

That winter, as in years past, Father La Frambois failed to secure a single convert. "I've made headway with other bands. Why are you people so obstinately, willfully blind?" he asked me.

I shall say here what I couldn't tell Father La Frambois: his stories did not make sense to us. Bear Soldier, head-chief of our band and my own father, was a logician whose counsel was solicited by other leaders. He listened to the anecdotes I dutifully translated for the priest—Cain slaying Abel, Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac, Joseph delivered into slavery by his jealous brothers—and shook his head. My father wanted to know, "Why are his people so determined to kill their relatives?"

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So I asked Father, "Why did Cain murder his brother?"

Father pointed at me and shook his finger. "Because he didn't have faith."

I told my father, "When the priest's people don't believe in the higher spirits they go crazy."

"Then we'll pray for them," he said.

My father had seen other bands trade with white people, succumb to diseases and grow dependent upon their superior goods. He decided that we would only trade with our traditional sources: other bands and friendly tribes. Our arrows were tipped with filed bone not metal; we used the stomach lining of a buffalo to cook our meals rather than shiny kettles; we passed over mirrors, flour, coffee, and used quills and paint to decorate our clothing rather than the colorful beads from Europe. I felt it would be rude to tell the priest his teachings were just another import for us to resist. Instead I told him, "We will not be degraded."

Father's mouth fell open and his tongue flicked out and then back in, like an alert frog's. He swallowed the words he was about to deliver. I quickly apprehended. In Father La Frambois's view of the world we were already a degraded people that he intended to elevate, single-handedly, into the radiant realm of civilization.

I dream of that place where the North Platte River crosses the Laramie, a place of soldiers, treaties and immigrant trains. I've never been there in waking life, but I still recognize Fort Laramie. I've heard that in springtime this area is a green blanket of lush buffalo grass, but in my dream the ground is dead white. I am walking through a field of—what? My legs push through tall stalks of limp parchment paper, shredded, tattered, a grim harvest sprouting from chalky soil. Death crackles beneath my moccasins. The grass is gone, and the wildflowers and delicate lacewings, the plump grasshoppers, cottonwood trees, the lively killdeer. As far as I can see—squinting in every direction—the paper spreads, licking across the land like a prairie fire out of control. I want to leave this

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nightmare. I look at my feet and notice that each step I take leaves a stunted patch of pale dry grass, struggling to grow.

I am here for a reason, I tell the wind, and it whips the paper, threatens to tear it from the white plains. *I am the uneasy voice of the grass.*

Like Ghost Horse, my life was altered by a dream. It was decided that I would travel to Fort Laramie after the spring thaw. No one knew what would happen once I arrived—assuming I completed the treacherous journey—least of all myself. Father La Frambois had said the Lord called him into service, and this is how I felt; directed by the spirits. All winter I suppressed a nervous euphoria, vacillating between fear and anticipation.

My brother Long Chase was two years younger than I, sixteen, but had already brought down buffalo bulls and accompanied war parties on raids against the Arikara. Long Chase told me: "*Tanke*," older sister, "I am coming with you. You can tell me not to, but I'll just follow anyway. Get used to it."

Father La Frambois left before I did to visit more promising bands: Indians who pressed their lips to the large crucifix dangling from his belt, who could chant prayers in Latin. When he departed, his horse seemed aware that the village was watching, and it minced across the prairie, lifting its stocky legs higher than was necessary.

I had written the priest a formal farewell message to show off my elegant script and signed it *Esther* as a final act of kindness. But nowhere in the missive did I mention Fort Laramie or the dream or my coming trip. For years I thought I was shielding Father La Frambois from information I felt he would never understand, would, in fact, find disturbing. It was only as I watched his bent figure diminish to a speck, that I realized my motives were suspect. I had been protecting myself, refusing to speak aloud the legends and ideas I thought would sound absurd in bare English. I nurtured secrecy to avoid derision. Perhaps this was why the dream came to me. A rare opportunity for redemption.

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The day before my journey was to begin I climbed the flat top of Angry Butte to pray. I added my prayer—a heavy flat rock—to all the others. They formed a neat pile that rose to my waist. I was careful not to brush my fingers across the other invocations, this place was so powerful I thought I could hear the stones speak. My foot slipped on a round pebble and I fell on my back with such force the wind left my body. I looked for the pebble with angry intentions. I found it touching a second stone, its duplicate, and scooped them into my hand. The stones were perfectly round and unblemished. I lifted one to my cheek, it was impossibly smooth.

"They are twin sisters," my mother told me when I showed them to her. "You were meant to find them." I painted them red, the color of life, and wrapped them in soft buckskin.

The stones move with a purpose, I told Father La Frambois in my thoughts, though the purpose was a mystery to me.

The next is hard to say, the picture is so vivid. Bear Soldier and Black Moon stood in front of their lodge, their hands fastened on my sister's frail shoulders. Walks Visibly winced in pain. She anchored them there, too young to follow me as Long Chase would. No one cried, it would be disrespectful to the spirits who had planned this course of action, but the family must have feared it would never see me or my brother again.

This is what we looked like as we slipped into the unknown. One pony carried our household goods, our water, fire horn, pemmican and jerky. The other carried a small lodge, the smoked hides lashed onto the poles. Long Chase carried a compact short bow and would ride ahead. We had both packed moccasins stolen from enemy tribes—Crow and Arikara—to wear in their territory so our tracks wouldn't give us away.

Spotted Dog shivered with excitement and sat down only to jump up again, running between the ponies' legs. "You'll get kicked in the head," my brother warned him. "Settle down." The dog sighed and crouched impatiently.

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The last face I saw was partially hidden by a clump of switchgrass. Ghost Horse moved quickly past everyone else, his arms and legs flashing, a lightning storm in our midst. He chuckled as he handed me a smoked shield of tough buffalo bull hide. I turned it over to inspect its face. It pictured a woman in a red dress clutching an arrow of lightning in her hand. She seemed fierce, unfamiliar. Twenty-one rattlesnake rattles dangled from the bottom edge of the shield, so with each step I sounded like a den of restless snakes.

Ghost Horse grinned at me, baring his perfect teeth, but the one eye I could see beneath cords of grass was so red he could have been weeping blood. I clutched the shield as I mounted my pony, tried to still my shaking hands. Ghost Horse seized the bridle and for one moment tossed the grass from his forehead.

"I will never miss you," he said.

That day there was a white sky. Clouds choked the horizon and crowded the sun. The sky was so low we were in the sky, we were air, we were something other than what we had been before.

"*Tanke*," I heard my brother whisper. "The spirits are all around us."

We traveled southwest on the heels of Spotted Dog who glanced over his shoulder every few steps to be certain he was heading in the right direction.

"You're not fooling us," my brother called to him. "You're not in charge."

The pale sky sapped my spirits. I was glad when the sun burned through the clouds, and searing light peeled back layers of mist. We rode into a valley of trembling flowers, the lacy petals fluttered in the wind.

"Butterflies," Long Chase breathed. Indeed, the flowers were actually swallowtail butterflies, their creamy wings edged in blue. I had never seen so many in one place. There were enough of them to bend stems of grass, they dripped from the stalks.

"The ancestors are watching us," I said. "Look at how many we have."

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The butterflies lifted then in a rippling cloud and took over the sky. My brother stopped his pony to watch what looked like a snowstorm in reverse, the drifts banking heaven. "This is an odd day," he finally said.

Father La Frambois was frequently in my thoughts. How would he have explained what happened next? I would have told him: *Father, we stepped into a dream, into a world governed by the spirits. Father, for two weeks we never saw another person; no tribesmen, no enemies, only passing herds of elk and antelope.* My brother carried his short bow, and I held my shield, and Spotted Dog pretended to lead the way, his tail straight as a flag, and we marched across the territory as if we were the only creatures in the land. We covered the distance in two weeks and camped within sight of the fort, dazed and exhausted. Even Spotted Dog collapsed in a careless sprawl.

"What happens next?" Long Chase asked me.

"Tomorrow we visit the fort. One thing at a time."

He looked at me, and I saw the boy in his face, the deep pucker of dimples on either side of his mouth he tried so hard to smooth. The edge of one thick braid was clamped between his teeth, rolled back and forth to produce a wet squeak. He caught himself and spat the braid from his mouth. He trusted that I understood what had brought us here. I didn't. But as the older sister I flashed a smile and told him: "Tomorrow will be an adventure. Your friends would be jealous."

That night I noticed that Spotted Dog crept beside Long Chase and slept with his forepaws against my brother's chest. All night their hearts beat together.

Upstream from the fort was a village I would later hear the soldiers refer to as Squaw Town. This was the place we visited first. The people who lived there were our cousins—a different band of the same tribe. Their leader was a man with a name I have forgotten because I thought of him as Death Shirt, and when my brother and I spoke of him, that was the name we used. His cloth shirt was decorated with tiny metal snuff-

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boxes—sinister as coffins—pierced and sewn so closely together he jangled. He wore a soldier's forage cap squashed low on his head and ragged moccasins shedding beads. He blinked at me and then at Long Chase. We were wearing our ceremonial clothes, our finest buckskins. My dress was painted red and decorated with elk teeth, and my brother's shirt dyed blue and stitched with quilled stars—he was a piece of the sky.

Death Shirt shuffled his feet. He asked us: "Are you the ghosts of our ancestors?"

"No," I said. "Where we come from we still dress the old way."

He passed his hand across his eyes, and I noticed three parallel scars on his chin. "Come with me," he said.

We were led through the village and several times I heard Long Chase draw breath too quickly. He stepped close to me and whispered in my ear, "*Unšika.*" Pitiful. The children were barefoot, chewing their fingers, and their mothers stood with long hair unbraided, tangling in the wind. Many of them wore fabric clothes that were coming apart at the seams.

"These ones come from a long time ago," Death Shirt told the village, gesturing at the two of us.

Some of the women were crying, but silently, tears running quick as water. Gifts were pressed into our hands: pebbles, berries, a handful of earth beans and another of parched corn. "We give what we can," an older woman said. She lifted her arm like a hunter wielding a lance and trilled her tongue in thunderous rolls, she could have had a thousand tongues. My brother and I shook hands with our cousins and packed the gifts in parfleche containers strapped to our ponies. We handed out presents of our own: moccasins, jerky and our last cake of pemmican. The women continued to praise us with their voices, even after we rode away. By the time we reached Fort Laramie the noise was a sad drone, like bees singing in our ears.

Fort Laramie was little more than a hodgepodge of buildings scattered across a flat plain. Mismatched structures of white-

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washed adobe and blond wood cluttered the area, framed by Laramie Peak some fifty miles to the west. The soldiers smelled of rancid butter and looked uncomfortably warm in their uniforms. When I introduced myself as Esther and Long Chase as Joseph, and tilted my head so the silver crosses I wore fell forward, we were told that the Post Chaplain, a Reverend Pyke, would be most eager to meet us.

"He's convinced the Sioux will never be real Christians," the private said.

We were led beyond the parade grounds to a cluster of cottonwood trees hunched together like old men. I saw the giant's back and smelled his malodorous top hat of poorly tanned beaver hide, from several yards away. He was shooting at a tree, I thought, until we were close enough to see that he had nailed a dozen bull snakes to the trunk and was methodically firing at their heads. They were still moving, rippling against the wood. I had to look at the ground. My brother touched my arm to comfort me. His fingers felt like five smooth serpents wrapped around my wrist.

Reverend Pyke turned, and I looked into his eyes. They were a remarkable color, somewhere between green and black, charred, like burnt grass. A broad forehead dominated his features and his brown beard wasn't on his chin but below it, like a thick strip of bear fur stuck to his throat. His red skin was peeling in several places, and he fingered the patches as he stared at me. He didn't seem to notice my brother.

The first words he spoke were: "*Mine enemies are lively and they are strong, and they that hate me wrongfully are multiplied.*" In unison we continued: "*They also that render evil for good are mine adversaries, because I follow the thing that good is.*"

Pyke thrust his fingers in his beard and scratched the hidden flesh. "Do you follow the thing that good is?" he asked me.

"I would if I knew what that was," I replied.

He nodded his great head, substantial as a cannonball. "You are of upright conversation," he said.

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As easily as that I attached myself to the fort, becoming a kind of personal secretary to Reverend Pyke. "I want to know what my left hand is doing," he bellowed on that first day. He called me Esther Left Hand. I passed myself off as the Christian Father La Frambois had tried so long to create. I relished the irony and would have been rather smug were it not for the fact that each day was a step into the void. I was no closer to understanding the purpose of my mission.

My brother and I camped between the fort and the village of our cousins, and went in opposite directions for most of the day. Long Chase had befriended several young warriors and together they trekked north to find game. "You're a good influence on them," I told him one evening. "You're already so capable." He scowled to hide his pleasure.

Long Chase had instructed Spotted Dog to watch over me, so every morning the dog led me to the fort and settled in a corner of the patched windowless lean-to Pyke referred to as his study. A vast mirror hung above his desk, its gilt frame a horror of twisted vines and sharp leaves; angry-looking foliage. I thought of it as Eden Lost. The first time I was alone in that room I stepped to the looking glass and touched my reflection with a finger. It was the only time I'd seen myself in a proper mirror, but the glass was so wavy it was like staring into water. I was struck by how my mouth tipped downwards in a child's pout, and I hadn't realized that I watched the world through my eyelashes. I didn't observe myself for very long. My eyes were the same shape as my mother's, curved like wings, watching them made me lonesome.

I transcribed Pyke's sermons, my hand dipping into ink like a bird pecking at water and then sweeping across the page to keep pace with the rapid language. I knew the Bible well enough to catch when Pyke departed from his own words to quote Scripture. One passage he returned to again and again, while his fingers wandered over the silver revolver he kept on his blotter, "*The wicked have drawn out the sword and bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, to slay such as be of upright conversation. Their sword shall enter their own heart, and their bows shall be broken.*"

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Pyke often raged in the study, his lecture becoming personal, perhaps more revelatory than he intended. "I'm a child of the wilderness," he told me. "God's child. I sprouted from the earth like a bean. No mother, no father, no strangling ties to come between me and the Lord."

Pyke was never without his smelly top hat and on the windiest days managed to keep it glued to his enormous head. His fingers were strangely flat and pale as grubs, except for the rim of dirt under the nails. I observed that while his flesh was none too clean, and I believe his clothes had never been scrubbed, he was fastidious about his space. His cherry-wood desk was so well polished it looked as if crimson flames burned beneath the surface, his books were regularly dusted and arranged in terms of size so that the shortest books led to the tallest, and the planks forming the study floor—though gapping and uneven—were soaped and buffed to reveal the wood's golden heart. Insect life wasn't safe in his presence, he crushed what he could, and Pyke said there was nothing natural about the natural world; it was an evil disorder requiring the cleansing hand of God. When he came across a spider's sac of eggs nestled in the folds of his heavy jacket, he squashed it with his fingers and licked them clean.

"I've swallowed the spit of Satan," he announced.

He watched me while I worked. I kept my eyes on the papers before me but I could feel him staring and I could smell the sharp decay of his hat. I marveled that his fingers never grabbed me by the braids, tearing me from the earth so that I too was no longer part of the natural world but his creature, a lifeless polished trophy like the preserved prairie dog mounted on a block of wood and serving as a doorstop. Instead he fingered the beard at his throat or the silver revolver, and I labored to set down Pyke's vision of America: a place where animals were bred for food behind neat fences, mountains were leveled, valleys filled, rivers straightened and grass trained with a ruler.

"Man is the organizer," he said. "Adam named the creatures, mastered the elements and answered to no one but the Lord. This is the legacy we must claim for ourselves."

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I scratched the words onto stiff paper but had the sudden urge to yank the land from beneath Pyke's feet like a slippery rug.

On Sundays I sat in the back of the low-ceilinged hall Reverend Pyke borrowed for his services and tried not to envy Long Chase his freedom. Pyke's voice didn't have anywhere to go in the small space, even the thick wool uniforms couldn't absorb the fierce syllables, so his commotion penetrated my ears like a great clanging bell. I watched the congregation through my eyelashes, practiced stillness and control of my heart, which I thought of as a fist-sized Indian pony, all kicking legs and snapping tail. I slowed its gallop to a walk and measured each step it took. *I run my own body*, I thought.

The handful of officers' wives sat together towards the front, surrounded by their husbands. I couldn't tell if the women were fenced in or the men shut out. I was fascinated by their pallor, a white so pale it was tinted blue, like thin milk. Their clothes squeezed the breath from them and rendered their bodies tight as bow strings. I longed to reach out and pluck them, play their one quavering note. The laundresses from Soapsuds Row and the housekeepers sat behind them, decidedly healthier in complexion. These ladies had tired feet that looked to be planted for eternity, and darting eyes. I don't know how many of Pyke's words they digested, they seemed intent on soaking up the subterranean sounds of people trapped together: the rustles, coughs, whispers, sighs.

One lady, like myself, was without a group and sat to the far right of the congregation, so diminutive her feet didn't touch the ground. Pyke had said she was a recent widow and it seemed so, her black dress was still crisp and tidy, unlike those of other widows who turned them inside-out after a time to get more wear. The color pinched her even tighter than her corset and in profile she nearly vanished like the flat of a sword, except for her breasts, tiny and round as ground cherries. I soon noticed that while this lady always wore black she also managed a spot of color, perhaps a folding fan, a ribbon pinned beneath her brooch, a nodding sunflower

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threaded into her bonnet. I thought of these items as her intentions speaking through.

One morning at dress parade I found myself standing beside the widow. She interested me more than the mechanical movements of the soldiers who stretched across the horizon, their white gloves gleaming like teeth.

"Oh, look at the guidons," she murmured. One open hand covered her pulsing throat and the other dabbed at her upper lip with a square of delicate lace. The flags streamed behind the soldiers, pulled taut by the wind. The sky was pasted with the company colors. Sweeping gusts took most of the sounds—the orders being called, the jingling of spurs and harnesses, the indignant snorts of cavalry horses—so the parade became an eerie drama of tremendous silent activity. I was unimpressed with the display, it struck me as the kind of thing Pyke would have dreamed up in his hankering for artificial order, simulated grace. But I said something appreciative to the widow, to make out I was enjoying the spectacle as much as she did.

When the soldiers were given orders to retire and began leaving the field, the widow turned to me. Her eyes were light brown and unusually bright, they reminded me of the nuggets of fool's gold Father La Frambois carried in his pocket. "I'm Fanny Brindle," she said. "You've been watching me."

I must have started because she touched my arm with one finger. "That's not a complaint, it's an observation."

Fanny Brindle removed her hat. Her dark blond hair was pinned up but seemed to strain against the combs, several wisps rolled across the slopes of her head like miniature tumbleweeds. She had a tight little face and sharp nose that pointed downwards, steady as a compass.

"Are you a woman alone?" she asked me.

"No," I shook my head. "I have my brother Joseph, and my dog, and—" Here I should have said something about the Lord to continue my pose as a Christian Sioux, but I forgot myself. "And my ancestors are looking out for me," I said.

Fanny didn't notice. "I am alone," she said. "My husband

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was Sergeant Guy Brindle, but he died three months ago from scarlet fever. I dosed him with potassium chlorate and ordered him not to leave, but you see the good it did me." She wrenched a tall sunflower from the ground and tucked it into her belt. "Not to worry, though. It wasn't a love match. I came here as a governess, and he offered me an easier life than that. I think it's the reason polite company won't breathe in my direction. I used to enter their rooms by the back door.

"We should be friends," Fanny told me. She laughed and nudged the dirt with her toe. "I can't get any lower."

Fanny's artlessness—some would have said, thoughtlessness—was part of her charm. I began to think of her as a sunflower, all open face and spitting seeds. She liked to stroll from one end of the fort to the other, her slender twig of an arm hooked through mine. She was eager to share the latest gossip gleaned from Bailey Roe, the enlisted man who had worked for her husband as striker and still offered some occasional assistance.

"He is a man of remarkable hearing and recall," she confided. "His word is gospel."

It was early October, *Čanwapekasna Wi*, the moon when the leaves rustle. The buffalo grass was a drab brown and winter's breath swirled across the plain. Pyke was working on a treatise titled, "Laramie, the Lord's Outpost," and didn't release me or the watchful Spotted Dog until the sun was well into its downward arc. On these days Fanny met me at the door of Pyke's study, quickly taking my arm and heading in the direction of the river. Fanny wasn't one to stifle her curiosity. She came right out and asked me: "Does he pay you for the work you do?"

"I don't think he makes much more than the enlisted men," I said. "But he takes me to the sutler's store every now and then for supplies."

"Well, he should," Fanny sniffed.

I had a habit of addressing Fanny and Pyke and the others at the fort in silence, speaking in my head. The truth had to

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let itself out some way or I would have confused myself. What I said in the secrecy of my thoughts was: *Fanny,* mazaska— *the white iron you call, money—is useless to me. Even the goods I take from the sutler's store, the flour, coffee, sugar and tobacco, the knives and blankets, are things I do not want. I give them to my cousins who live upriver.*

Fanny squeezed my arm impatiently—perhaps she saw these ideas moving across my forehead—and said: "Do you know what they're saying about you? That you're a princess." I didn't react but she nodded her head in affirmation. "Yes, a Sioux princess with the light of the world in your heart, and a devotion to Jesus Christ that is so pure your soul is white as cream. I think it's because of your remarkable English," she mused to herself. "They can't conceive of it as anything but a miracle, and it is, you know. It is."

I smiled at Fanny, assured her that I wasn't a princess and thanked her for complimenting my speech. But what I really said to Fanny was, "Kola, *friend, look at this sullen brown grass, dispirited because winter is coming to punish it. This, to me, is English. It is little pebbles on my tongue, gravel, the kind of thing you chew but cannot swallow. Dakota is the lush spring grass that moves like water and tastes sweet.*"

By November, *Waniyetu Wi*, the month of the winter moon, Fanny could not be persuaded to go on long walks but remained in her room, wrapped in a heavy shawl. I visited her there though it shamed her to have company, even mine, in such a place. After her husband died a new lieutenant had claimed his apartments as a superior officer was entitled to do, so Fanny had been ranked out of her home and into a narrow hallway of the same quarters. The young lieutenant was sensitive enough to her plight to avoid using the hallway; he left and entered his rooms via the window.

An overstuffed divan pushed against one wall served as her couch and bed, and she told me that she washed and dressed in the huge walnut wardrobe which took up so much of the hallway one could barely squeeze past it. Sergeant Brindle's photograph dominated a mother-of-pearl inlaid table, and

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while he may have looked bright and hopeful if you saw the picture alone, the drumming clock placed beside it cast a shadow across his face so that he looked wistful, aware of the coming fever.

"He wasn't very handsome, was he?" Fanny said. It had been decided, so I knew better than to respond. "But he wasn't cruel or petty, you can see the kindness, there, in his moustache." Fanny pointed to meager wisps of hair sprouting above a plump lip.

I ventured a question of my own. "Do you think you'll marry again?"

"I hope to," she said, without a breath or any pause. "Oh, it would be a shame to be here, so outnumbered by men they're thick as fleas, and not claim another. I work on it a little." Her face flushed then, becoming a red mask, "I go to all the hops, and dance and dance until I lose my feet, forget my toes were ever there. I just float in the officers' arms and turn into a cloud." She laughed. "A rather black cloud. Well, they have fair warning then!" Fanny looked at her little feet, tapped her heels together and grinned so broadly her eyes squeezed shut.

Fanny's mention of fleas proved prescient. The fort suffered a terrible infestation of the pests, flourishing despite the cold weather. The enlisted men blamed a recent shipment of blankets, though the sutler blanched and swore whenever this possibility was mentioned. I washed my skin and Spotted Dog's fur with buffalo grease and ashes, so we didn't suffer, but Pyke, the soldiers, and even the fine ladies were patched with welts and scabs from zealous scratching.

Fanny decided to organize a theatrical to take everyone's mind off the plague.

"I want to be distracted, don't you?" she asked. When I didn't answer quickly enough she said, "Oh, you. You aren't bothered in the slightest. I can see it. They don't like that Indian blood, do they?" No, I had to admit they didn't.

The next day she tacked up a neat sign on the porch of Old Bedlam—the unmarried officers' quarters—announcing the staging of *Macbeth*.

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"You have to help me with this," she pleaded, so I became her assistant.

I had read the play aloud under the tutelage of Father La Frambois and was curious to see what Fanny and the soldiers would make of it. I thought Reverend Pyke might disapprove of the scheme, but he supported it and in fact landed a role, three roles to be precise, since he would play all three of the witches.

"Measured fun is a holy pleasure," Pyke blasted that Sunday to a chorus of nodding heads.

A stage only slightly larger than an oven range was erected in the front parlor of Old Bedlam, and auditions were held in the evening between Stable Call and Retreat. Pyke was cast as the three witches because there simply wasn't room for more of them onstage. Many of the roles were combined and speeches cut. Fanny insisted we would get to the meat of the story and trim the rest, and by the time the officers in the company had their say, the scenes were mostly swordplay, complete with uncorked sabres and plumed hats. One of my jobs was to prompt the actors in their lines, what lines remained, and the text became as familiar to me as Scriptures until I began to confuse the two, and would quote Shakespeare as readily as passages from Ecclesiastes.

Long Chase was curious about my activities and asked me what I was doing. There was no term in Dakota for "Assistant Director," so I said I was helping the *wašičuns* tell stories. Then I told him about the fleas and leapt on my pony to imitate the soldiers' odd canter, how they leaned forward in the saddle to scratch their ankles. Long Chase collapsed on the ground, clutching his ribs and rolling with laughter. Spotted Dog jumped over him, barked, thrust his wet nose into Long Chase's face.

"That was a good one," my brother said when he could finally speak.

During the two-week rehearsal period I became acquainted with several of the officers I'd previously thought of as faceless.

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The three I came to know best were those with the largest roles, needing the most prompting from my corner. It was my opinion that Fanny had miscast them, each woefully unsuited to the part. Lieutenant Royal Bourke, who would play Macbeth, had sky eyes and blond hair like moist honey dripping to his shoulders. He was polished, without being insincere, and had the smoothest voice, really it was like the bolt of silk I'd seen in the sutler's store. He never failed to notice the lurking Spotted Dog and spoke to him so gently the dog came forward and bowed his head, then, in perfect Dakota etiquette, lifted one pumpkin-colored paw to shake hands. And this man would play the irresolute tyrant? I would have chosen Captain Philander Merritt, the handsomest of the three and the most inscrutable. His pale skin glimmered against hair that was thick and black as my own, eyes brown as acorns. His long eyelashes fluttered before he spoke and white teeth perched prettily on his bottom lip when he smiled, but there was tension in his face and shoulders, lines in his young forehead that made me question his friendliness. His body was compact but dense, and as the betrayed Banquo who returns as a ghost to haunt Macbeth, ineffective; he was too solidly in the world for me to ever imagine dead.

Finally, the bold, heroic Macduff who so capably vanquishes Macbeth would be portrayed by Lieutenant Lemon Van Horn, youngest of the officers and the one whose questions frequently went unanswered because no one heard him. I could tell that his uniform had been altered to hide a wispy figure, but his face was round, plumped out by soft jowls too smooth for whiskers. His face was fairly red with freckles and his hair red-gold, though lusterless, like his spirits. People seemed to either confuse or tire him, and when he mocked Macbeth during the play's climax, charging. "*Turn, hell-hound, turn!*" it was with great drawn-out sighs.

Lady Macbeth proved to be the most difficult part to cast since the ladies felt it would be undignified to participate, and Fanny couldn't cast herself. At the last minute she convinced a recent arrival to the fort, the young wife of a non-com-

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missioned officer, Melody Kendall, to step into the role. The young woman could recite well enough but had to be dissuaded from wearing hoops and the latest gown from Boston, decorated with fabric roses large as cabbages. "Ringlets will never do," Fanny scolded gently. She pointed to the tight clusters springing above Melody's ears.

The night of the performance Fanny was in a generous mood. She ushered me to a seat near the front, just behind the commanding officers and their carefully coiffed wives who surreptitiously, or so they thought, scratched beneath smooth waves of hair, behind spread fans.

"You've made a hit," she whispered loudly in my ear. "Just look at you. Old Bedlam will never be the same."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, you. Everyone's half mad with love, or maybe lust." Here she pinched my forearm so enthusiastically it hurt.

"No, no," I demurred, quite honestly.

Fanny sat down beside me, and her small forehead worked itself into a web of lines. "Don't you know you're beautiful?" she asked. I felt Spotted Dog shift against my leg. Fanny picked up one of my hands as casually as she would a teacup. "Look at this, look at these long delicate bones, nails glossy as porcelain. I can't stand it." She dropped my hand and fell back into the chair in one motion. "I think it's that curl of a smile that finally does them in, partway between a sneer and a laugh. Makes them work to impress you.

"I thought you knew," she concluded. "I thought it was a manipulation."

I could only shake my head at Fanny, my friend who was surely carried away by the night's festivities and her own complicated flirtations.

A brocade curtain rigged up by Fanny's striker, Bailey, lifted to enthusiastic applause and so much squirming I thought I could see a fog of fleas rise up and redistribute themselves. Pyke's witches were in good voice, he thundered spells while energetically stirring soapy water in one of the laundress' borrowed tubs. When he came to the familiar chorus—"Double,

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double toil and trouble; fire burn and cauldron bubble"—there emerged a dozen witches as soldiers in the audience shouted the lines with him.

Too often actors absentmindedly raked fingernails through beards or across their flesh to discourage the biting fleas, but since the spectators were similarly afflicted it was overlooked. Lady Macbeth, as it turned out, was determined to be fashionable, and her hoops took up the entire stage, causing anyone sharing her scenes to stand on the floor and gaze up at her. Her ringlets bounced with passion, eliciting titters from the crowd, and one man snickered loudly when she scratched rather than rubbed the imagined spot of blood on her hand, all the while wearing elbow-length kidskin gloves and twirling an open parasol.

The final battle was vigorously performed, an exchange of blows that went on for nearly half an hour, but when the curtain plunged to the ground we clapped at the effort, and the parlor was filled with a happy buzz. The ladies produced eggnog, and I was about to leave, when Lemon Van Horn—Macbeth's cloth head still tucked under one arm—handed me a glass of the creamy liquid.

"You aren't leaving?" he said in his weary voice.

Surrounded by Lemon, Royal, a handful of other officers and even the wary Merritt, I saw truth in Fanny's observations. I felt stifled by attention and sought comfort in Spotted Dog, resting at my feet. I spread my fingers through his coarse fur and felt the regular rhythm of his heart pulsing beneath my fingertips. He occasionally rolled his eyes to meet mine and wouldn't look away until I smiled.

What can they possibly want from me? I wondered. A midnight rendezvous in Squaw Town? Something furtive and shameful, to be quickly forgotten? The eggnog left a sour taste; I ran my tongue across my teeth and nearly gagged. I sat as straight as I could and smiled, or sneered, however they chose to read my expression. I was careful not to look into their eyes so there would be no message.

The men chattered, told anecdotes and in the telling stag-

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gered or waved their arms, jumped onto chairs, pounded their comrades on the back, punched shoulders. It became a blur of sound and movement I associated with the smell of curdled cream. Somewhere during the mayhem I slipped my hand into the quilled pouch dangling from my waist. My fingers searched for a sliver of the bitter muskrat root which would quickly change the taste in my mouth. I touched something else. Two smooth stones clicking together, released from buckskin wrapping. I cupped one in my palm to be certain of the object. Earlier that evening when I left the lodge I shared with my brother, these stones had been buried in a shallow hole beneath my pallet. Some hidden force had pushed them through the ground, propelled them through the air, and tucked them into my bag where they nested like crimson eggs.

The stones move with a purpose, I told the officers. But in my private way, which was no warning.

I am leaving Old Bedlam, which has lived up to its name on this occasion. Men watch me as I travel lightly down the steps. Now I am a dark figure, a shadow moving across the yard. I bend smoothly to place the stones beneath a clump of weeds, not knowing I would do it. Every step, every gesture is natural, spontaneous. I am inevitable as light or darkness, steady as rain. I push out my breath to match the wind and soar in the direction of my brother's sleep. Spotted Dog is ahead of me, grinning to himself as he leads the way.

I'm coming, I sing to him. *I'm coming*. But now I think I'm telling the ancestor-spirits who have waited so long for me to move, as I am moving now.

Upon arriving I don't enter the lodge, but sit outside, my arms and legs carefully folded. Spotted Dog leans into my side, lets his weight fall against me. For once I am the alert one, impervious to chill winds and tired feet, to hunger and thirst. "You rest," I tell him.

Later I will find myself standing beside the river, drawn to the battered cottonwood tree blasted by a revolver. I am utterly alone. I will hear the man before I see him. He is not so

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graceful, his stumbling feet churn the dry grass. Whiss. Whiss. He is the sleepy one with red hair and freckles, the one whose voice is easily lost. He walks to me without hesitation and doesn't flinch when I reach for his hand. The stones are there, clenched in the fist I peel open one finger at a time. I return the stones to my pouch and pluck a strand of hair from my head. I lean into the man as I wind the thread of hair around a brass button on his jacket; the slow circles enchant us both. He wears the rope across his chest like a cartridge belt. I tell him what to do. I look into his eyes for the first time and see only myself. I have forgotten their color. I leave him to his work, turning my back on the man and the tree.

I will return to Long Chase and Spotted Dog, sidestepping their dreams as I make my way to the buffalo hide I use to cover myself. I will not see how the man, so recently a boy, climbs the tree and coils the rope as tenderly as I wound hair around the button beneath his heart. He will be graceful as he steps into black air, the night space, flying for a long moment. And when he is forced to land, I will not see the color of his face. The sudden emptiness.

It was Pyke, prowling the fort's perimeter on his early morning reconnaissance with the Lord, who came across Lemon Van Horn hanging from a cottonwood tree. His boots were only a few inches from the ground, so for a moment it must have looked to Pyke as if Lemon were just standing in front of the tree.

"He has thrown his soul to the dogs," Pyke growled that day. "He will languish in purgatory for what he has done. Quick, Esther, take this down. I will address the subject on Sunday."

I had noticed before that any mention of the loss of human life filled Pyke with a peculiar dread. I don't mean the inevitable sorrow, or the rage one feels when a loved one dies, but a terrible fear penetrating his thoughts, drilling his bones.

"Man is close to almighty, he should not be cut down. And to tear himself out of the world—this is an abomination!" Pyke stamped across the study floor, his arms flung open and

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fingers trembling. "I am unsettled," he said. His candor took me by surprise. He tore at the strip of fur beneath his chin and strode past me. He left the study and didn't think to shut the door.

I observed Pyke closely to escape my own feelings which were heavy as a hundred stones. *I am at war*, I told myself, knowing it was more complicated than that. I was also at war with myself.

I do not know who the stones will claim next. They are like red eyes that can see everything. Moonlight washes over me like a graceful blessing. This man is silent as he approaches the river, carrying a coiled lasso of rope. I can't hear his steps or the rope slapping against his thigh, but I can feel the force of his will. His black hair fades into the night, so the fair skin beneath that dark crest is like a torch. This man's body shudders with a dense quivering, his mind attempting to surface. The shaking stops him in his tracks. I move forward gently as a pulse of air and take the stones from his hand.

He is gasping as I wind a strand of my hair around his jacket button. This I do more tightly than before, longing to be finished so I can release him. His eyes are burning at the core, the pin of light at the center of his black pupil. He would like to kill me, but he cannot will his hands to do it.

"You are another one we won't have to fight," I tell him, but it isn't enough. I am forced to watch this time. The tree is hard to climb, several times he slides down the trunk. His movements are slow, reluctant. But the rope nearly twists itself.

A week before Christmas Fanny Brindle organized a skating party. "This will lift our spirits," she declared. Most of the officers and their families turned out, grateful for the distraction, though Pyke was conspicuously absent.

After Philander Merritt was found dangling from the same tree where Lemon had cast his rope, Pyke took an axe to it

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and not only felled the tree but chopped it into kindling. He said it would produce an evil smoke, so he tossed the chunks of wood into the river, watching grimly as they swirled away. I knew he was probably brooding in his study as we gathered beside the now frozen river, studiously avoiding the forlorn cottonwood stump.

"I am lost in a mysterious world," he had told me just the day before. He even grabbed my hand as I made ready to leave, kneading it with his flat paws. "Death is chaos," he said.

I was happy to be on the river where the cold wind drew tears from my eyes and whipped my mind clean. Several of the soldiers had crude blades strapped onto their boots and were moving across the ice like delicate insects skimming water. Their weight shifted from side to side in an elegant rhythm, hypnotizing me as I stood wrapped in a small buffalo calf robe.

The ladies without skates were being pushed in wooden chairs, whirled quickly on the ice, evoking cries of pleasure. Fanny was there, her skirt tucked around her legs and her hands inside a muff of beaver hide. She waved to me, then nearly lost the muff as she grabbed for the chair's back. Her face spun away.

Royal Bourke approached, his sky eyes wide with happiness and shoulders sparkling with snow. "Why are you standing here?" he asked me. "Why aren't you laughing?"

I avoided his blue gaze by counting his brass buttons. "I like to watch," I said.

"That isn't good enough." He extended his arm, and I took it as lightly as I could. He settled me in a sturdy ladder-back chair and then pressed me forward into currents of bright air; a place without breath or sound. The sky became a wheel as I twirled on the ice, the clouds streaming together and the sun becoming a long string of suns. I smiled, I bent over to laugh into my hands. The chair stopped.

"What's wrong?" Royal asked. He knelt on the ice. I shook my head and laughed a little more. "Oh, good. I thought you were dizzy," he chuckled.

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"I was. But it was nice," I told him.

When I thought Royal must surely be tired of the game—though he protested he could push me straight to Canada—I joined Fanny beside a table set with steaming mugs of cider.

"Wasn't it wonderful?" she asked. "It breaks my heart to go back to my hallway. I tell you, I wake up with frost on my eyebrows, hugging nothing friendlier than a can of yeast. To keep it warm, you know, or it would freeze like my potatoes. They're hard as rocks." Fanny sipped cider so tenderly it was almost like a kiss. "How do you make out in nothing better than a tent?"

I told her how Long Chase and I had built a willow stockade around our tipi, with a small runway for the ponies to protect them from night drafts. I worked the smoke flaps so we could build a fire in the lodge, the flames keeping us warm all night. "And Spotted Dog warms my feet," I said. His ears flicked forward at the mention of his name.

Later that night I told Long Chase about my dizzy ride.

"I wish I'd seen that. You must have looked funny," he teased. "We were playing too," he continued. "I made those kids a sled out of buffalo ribs, and we took it up there," he pointed to a distant coulee.

"That was a good thing," I said. I was proud of my generous brother who spent so many hours with the children of our cousins, teaching them things the old people in their village only talked about. But it was not our way to fuss over one another, my terse praise was enough.

I looked forward to sleep that night, having exhausted myself the way children do. I checked beneath my pallet, as I did every night, for the sacred stones I collected from Angry Butte and transported to this place of dying grass. My fingers anticipated their sleek texture, stretched eagerly to graze their faces. I marvelled at the warmth they emanated, even packed in frozen ground. I scratched the dirt, eventually turning my hands into claws that raked the earth. But it was useless, the stones were gone.

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The sentries are sleepy by the time I reach the fort's perimeter. One dreams with his eyes open, and the other is crushing the snow with his boots to make animal figures. I brush past them, first one and then the other, mad with potent energy, determined to be invisible. I take chances because I think I am the wind. The tree is gone and although there are others, I know better than to head in that direction. I move towards Old Bedlam and mount the stairs leading to its second story porch. I sway at the top, flinging my head back to count the stars. *I will give them officers' names*, I think. *I will send them soldiers*.

I hear footsteps and reach out to grasp the railing. He steps onto the porch and carefully closes the door behind him. He is not drowsy and he doesn't resist. I think if I told him to fly he would spread his arms and leap at the moon. He hands me the stones before I look for them and lifts the rope in his hands. It is a coarse snake wound between us.

"Give me your hair," he whispers, complice to this act. I wrap the button, but only once or twice. The thread floats free, and I don't snatch another from my open braid. He moves to the railing, his steps like a dance, and ties the rope in ugly ways. He slips his head in the loop, and I put out my hand for him to catch. There is a twitch of a smile on my lips because I have called him back. But he is suddenly a golden bird risen from the deck. He flies away.

Fort Laramie was a place of death—I had seen that in my dream—but now it was a place of ghosts, some of them living. Pyke retreated like a turtle, reading tracts for most of the day, the reading material in one hand and revolver in the other.

"You can't help me," he said when I knocked on his study door.

Rope was confiscated, placed under guard, and more soldiers assigned watch duty. Royal Bourke had sky eyes, but now he was buried in a shallow grave laboriously chipped out of the frozen earth. People walked with their heads down, moving briskly to get somewhere. Even Fanny was reclusive,

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seldom in sight. So I took it upon myself to pay her a visit, bringing her a piece of salt pork Long Chase had received from our cousins.

I rapped on her door but there was no answer. I opened it a crack so I could slip the package inside, and was stunned by what I saw. Fanny Brindle was no longer a woman alone. She lay on the divan, pressed into it by the weight of her striker, Bailey Roe. They seemed to have sprouted additional arms and legs, and were flailing them about. They resembled tangled crabs.

I chucked the salt pork into a corner and fled the room before the two could find their voices. I nearly stepped on Spotted Dog in my haste, for he lingered at the door. I was short with him. "Move it," I growled. We walked slowly away from the fort, Spotted Dog beside me rather than loping ahead. Perhaps he noticed the drag of my feet. My limbs were heavy and cut deep tracks through the snow. Loneliness swept across me until I thought my heart would disintegrate like powder. Fanny Brindle was a woman from the other world, but I would miss her. And I had understood, from the moment we latched eyes, that Fanny would never forgive me what I had seen.

Long Chase's warrior friends told him that a small buffalo herd had been spotted thirty miles to the north.

"*Tanke*, we're going to bring some back for your soup so you'll have something to talk to the corn," he said. He rubbed the lodge's skin wall, the smoked hide so worn it was becoming transparent. "We could use some new walls too. We're like a lantern at night."

Long Chase set off the next morning wearing his buffalo hide shirt with the coarse hair against his skin. I knew that before he turned his pony into the fleet stream of buffalos, he would shed the garment. My brother could ride like that, his flesh exposed to temperatures that would have claimed a soldier's fingers and toes with frostbite, inured to the cold through careful childhood training. He washed in the snow

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each morning, joined by Spotted Dog who thought it was a romp. I had seen them dive headlong into the powder as if it were the river back home.

Now I clasped my brother's hand and looked up at him settled on his horse. I didn't tell him to be careful. I didn't tell him anything at all because the child was missing that morning, replaced by a smiling man. He squeezed my hand and gave it back to me. I watched him ride away. I knelt on the ground beside Spotted Dog, my arms wrapped around his neck. The dog looked forlorn, upset to be left behind. He knew where Long Chase was headed after hearing "*Tatanka*," the term for buffalo.

"You don't want to leave me all by myself," I scolded him. And for a moment he lifted his eyes from my brother's receding back to look at me. His tongue rolled out, the sure sign of forgiveness, so I left him there and moved to tidy our camp.

I was visited that night by a bear. Not *mato*, our fierce brother whose claws are greatly prized, but a human bear bundled in furs. Reverend Pyke entered my lodge without a greeting, looking like a man of snow.

"Good evening," I said, polite though his abrupt entrance was rude. I gestured towards the caller's space to the left of my sputtering fire. "Make yourself comfortable," I told him.

Pyke's legs were stiff as tree trunks, his head grazed the wall. "I am not calling," he said to me. "I am not here." I looked at Spotted Dog as if he had an explanation. "But the Lord is here," Pyke continued. "The Lord suffuses my soul and expunges the wickedness he finds there with a flick of his tongue."

I was motionless before the raving giant, my senses assailed by his reeking hat and rumbling voice.

"The Lord told me that I was blessed," he continued. "He bade me *replenish the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth*. You will not work your ways on me," Pyke thundered. "I made you and fostered your demon intelligence. I will unmake you." And

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the one I had not spelled or visited with sacred stones brought his flat hand out of the fur wrappings strapped to his body. He raised his silver revolver, aiming it at my heart. The gun's barrel was a black eye, and when it exploded, a streak of bright color rose to meet the bullet. Spotted Dog fell at my feet. I knelt beside him and stroked his back. I rubbed the loose skin behind his ears.

"You are a brave dog," I murmured in Dakota, speaking the language I told myself he preferred. His blood spilled across my hands and it was while I struggled to catch each precious drop that the tent exploded a second time.

I had turned my back on the giant, he loomed somewhere above me.

"*Mičeȟpi*," I called, but not to him. "*Mičeȟpi*." My flesh.

I fell into a river of liquid as smooth as the cream *wašičuns* favored, and in that warm bath drawing me through *Ina's*—the mother's—heart, I was unperturbed by my own death. The recent events were banished from my mind, and I was free to indulge my sensibilities in ways forbidden me in life. I was raised to believe that discipline and self-control were signs of maturity, necessitating the suppression of individual desires. My feelings swept over me now, I was in a womb of my affections. Music penetrated the fluid and my wandering soul; a piercing sweetness from our Dakota courting flute. It was a tune composed by Ghost Horse, the thunder dreamer, a melody he played when I carried water from the river or collected wood for kindling. This was in the days before our dreams—so devastating in retrospect—set us upon divergent courses. My spirit throbbed in anger. I was like an old woman weeping for her children. Ghost Horse and I were victims of utter faith, I realized. We were Job, lonely and afflicted. Chosen. Only the music could stir me from my sudden brooding. I let it move through me until it became the words I couldn't speak and the tears I could not cry.

You will think that I was borne away but in fact I was a witness to what followed. I tracked Reverend Pyke in the snow

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as capably as a coyote. He hadn't gone far from the lodge; the ancestor-spirits had trapped him in the drifts and he was half-buried in snow. My sight was sharper than before so I could see into his deep pockets where twin sisters with red faces clacked together. The sacred stones had moved for the last time. Pyke's revolver had loosed a final shot, taking him by surprise, I think, for he looked puzzled and his left hand was latched onto his right wrist as if there'd been a struggle.

My brother Long Chase returned hours later with enough buffalo meat, tallow and winter hides to last us through the winter. He sang for me and for Spotted Dog, gashed his arms and legs to wear his grief and let it pour out of him. He removed the note Reverend Pyke had pinned to my dress. My brother couldn't read the words, but knew it was some work of spite. I read the lines, curious as I had ever been: "*Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life.*"

I shook my fists and smiled to hear them rattle. Was it madness, I wondered, or a crystal sanity that led him to write these words?

Long Chase quickly discovered Pyke after I nudged him in that direction. I didn't want him seeking vengeance. *You see, it's already done*, I told my brother. And then I whispered, *Go home*.

The return trip was a trek of heartbreak, exhaustion and hunger. Long Chase trudged through the snow and rarely looked ahead of him, so defeated, our enemies were the least of his concerns. I scouted for him, and the few times I spotted distant trouble my spirit made a nuisance of itself, torturing my brother's adversaries with flung rocks and snowy twisters until they changed direction.

Grass was beginning to poke through melting snow when Long Chase reached our winter camp. He emerged from a cloud of horses and was met by Father La Frambois, out for a stroll. My brother walked past him, numbly discourteous, and when the priest moved towards the body the ponies dragged behind them on a bed of furs, Long Chase caught

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his arm. No words passed between them but Father La Frambois soon gathered that he was shut out of the proceedings. He would not be allowed to handle my body or baptize me posthumously. His blessings and masses were politely refused. He never learned that in death, I finally became a bride.

Ghost Horse brought my father three sturdy ponies he'd captured from the Crows. "I have fulfilled my obligations as *heyo'ka*," he told my parents. "And I am free to take a wife. Your daughter never watched me, sent me messages, or stepped away from herself, but she is in here anyway." He tapped his chest. "I have these feelings that are only pitiful grains, but they are planted in my blood and growing." He held out his arms and stared at the veins as if he expected to find bold spikes of grass.

"I request the honor of marrying your daughter's spirit, mourning her as a devoted husband would grieve."

Ghost Horse did not bury me in the ground or build a scaffold, but placed me near the crown of a majestic bur oak tree. I was cradled by its spreading branches, rocked in its stout arms. My husband stood beside me in the tree and looked in every direction.

"You will see the world," he said. He ate the fruit of a dried plum and when its meat was gone, he very gently placed the pit in my mouth. It was the most intimate gesture that ever passed between us.

Before he left, my husband lifted the shield he had given me just a year earlier. "I want you to see what I've done," he told me. He pointed to fresh tracks of blue paint drawn across the tough bull hide. "I recorded your accomplishments," Ghost Horse continued. "You are a warrior and this is your shield."

I peered at the blue marks, my spirit slow to recognize the figures. Comprehension came in a rush, and when my hands flew to cover my eyes, I stirred a powerful wind. My husband nearly fell from the tree. I shrank from the paint, from the woman in a red dress wielding lightning. The jagged bolt was

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sharp at its tip, and three blue figures—men in uniform—were impaled by it, collected like beads strung on a needle.

Ghost Horse turned the shield to face this fierce woman. "We honor you," he said. He threaded his arm through the handles to wear the shield and rolled his arm in quick circles, making the rattlesnake gourds hiss. My spirit was tangled in the tree, dismayed and bewildered. *Who is this woman?* I wondered, and didn't want the answer to come to me. But the rattlesnake gourds produced a soothing sound, and my heart lifted when I saw the creatures emerge from their dens and hiding places. Serpents flowed toward the tree, forming creeks and rivers of writhing motion. They washed over one another, rising and then falling; they became a single unit of grace.

The snakes are dancing, I murmured. And when they surrounded the tree my spirit fell into their midst, prostrate. We danced together.

Ghost Horse kept my spirit for one year; the most onerous form of grief. His younger brother, Wind Soldier, agreed to help him, and together they prepared my spirit lodge and collected goods to be distributed at the culminating feast. But when the year had passed, and the village assembled for my spirit release ceremony, it was unsuccessful. Ghost Horse did what was expected of him, said the words and gave away his last possession, but he did not loose me from this earth. His heart was a stone room without doors.

My husband sought death on the battlefield, and it wasn't long before a bold Arikara complied. I did my best to deflect the arrows, pushed the air with both hands to send them swerving harmlessly away. But the Ree's horse wouldn't stumble when I leapt for its legs. It carried him so close to my husband, the Ree's shot was deadly, and by the time I reached Ghost Horse he was on the ground.

I thought he might see me now that his eyes were focused on the next world. I held his head in my arms and spread his long hair across my thighs. *Old man*, I teased, *are you ready*

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for this old lady? But he was silent, and his polished eyes were stones.

I didn't see him leave though it was like him to accept another adventure instantly. He moved on to the place our ancestors inhabit; there was no one living to capture his spirit as mine had been.

"You went without me!" I cried. I shook him by the shoulders. My spirit stubbornly clutched his body which made it hard for his uncles to lift him. "We go together!" I shrieked in their ears. I finally departed when Ghost Horse's pony spooked and almost flung his body back to the ground. The uncles were horrified and scolded the horse, but I understood its terror. It didn't want me on its back.

At least a hundred years have passed, and the plum pit in my mouth has become a grove of trees. I can smell the fruit when it ripens, and my breath makes the leaves rustle.

I am hitched to the living, still moved by their concerns. My spirit never abandons the Dakota people, though sometimes all it can do is watch. I was there when the army confiscated our horses to cut off our legs. I stood behind the Ghost Dancers and when they fainted in desperate, useless ecstasy, I blew a refreshing wind into their faces. There have been too many soldiers and too many graves. Too many children packed into trains and sent to the other side of the country. Many times I ran alongside those tracks and waved at the bleak copper faces. *You are Dakota*, I called to them. *You are Dakota*. One time I stood in front of a chuffing engine and tried to keep it from moving forward, but it blasted through me. I saw the language shrivel, and though I held out my hands to catch the words, so many of them slipped away, beyond recall. I am a talker now and chatter in my people's ears until I grow weary of my own voice. *I am memory*, I tell them when they're sleeping.

I prefer to watch the present unravel moment by moment, than to look close behind me or far ahead. Time extends from

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me, flowing in many directions, meeting the horizon and then moving beyond to follow the curve of the earth. But I will not track its course with my eyes. It is too painful. I can bear witness to only a single moment of loss at a time. Still, hope flutters in my heart; a delicate pulse. I straddle the world and pray to *Wakan Tanka* that somewhere ahead of me He has planted an instant of joy.

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~~contrite and quiet. The day after that, if she stayed out of the bars, Willy was~~ Alice once again ~~shy and~~ soft-spoken and half-way social.

But ~~A~~ bar with Angry Alice ~~socially~~ drinking in it was ~~a~~ only a ~~potential~~ battleground, an impending ~~fought, a yearning~~ pit, ~~a~~ because it quickly become a bar with Alic wide-open full-ass drunk in it could find itself emptied of all patrons in a matter of minutes, and remain empty until the management either closed down or kicked her out.

Closing down was easier. You could always wait fifteen or twenty minutes until she reeled off on her way to her next outrage, then open back up. If you kicked her out you ran the risk of giving her anger focus. She might be right back, with a snowclod to put a through your window, or shit in your pick-up seat. ~~Once~~ after being ejected from the Sand Bar into a ten below midnight, she stacked the garbage cans into a precarious scaffolding at the rear of the place so she could climb up on the roof ~~and~~ kick off the galvanized stove pipe and pee down into the oildrum stove. Withen seconds the street was full of ~~weeping~~ customers, ~~eyes wept~~ weeping like they'd gassed.

If you called the cops and Lieutenant Barnhardt got around to actually haling her off and locking her up for a week or so, you could expect trouble from some of the other Deaps, ~~who~~ Many secretly admired her spirit. ~~Once~~ one December, after an absolute unconditional expulsion brom the Crabbe Pot, some sly band of carpenters pried all the nails almost all the way out of the aluminum panals that sided the building. It ~~had to be~~ clearly was done by more than one nail-puller; ~~More than~~ three-quarters the siding

A manuscript page from Ken Kesey's novel Sailor Song.

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Ken Kesey

The Art of Fiction CXXVI

Ken Kesey was born in Colorado in 1935. His father, a rancher and outdoorsman, moved the family to Oregon in 1943. Kesey attended the University of Oregon, where he became a champion wrestler. After graduating, he received a Stegner fellowship from Stanford and studied fiction under Malcolm Cowley, Wallace Stegner and Frank O'Connor. His classmates included Ken Babbs, Larry McMurtry and Robert Stone. Kesey's first novel, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, *was published in 1962, followed by* Sometimes a Great Notion *in 1964. Both received considerable acclaim, and jointly they established Kesey's reputation as a vital force in American*

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literature. At the center of both are what Kesey calls "little warriors" battling large forces. Some critics have praised his work for its maverick power and themes of defiance; others have questioned his wild and paranoid vision.

During the last thirty years Kesey has become famous as a renegade prophet and prankster. In 1964 Kesey and a band of friends, the "Merry Pranksters," set off on a cross-country tour on the psychedelic bus Furthur, driven by Neal Cassady. In this "unsettling of America," they staged a variety of shows and psychedelic-drug experiments, which became the subject of Tom Wolfe's The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test *(1968). Kesey's exploits led to an arrest on marijuana charges, a flight to Mexico and eventually three months in jail. Kesey then returned to his farm in Pleasant Hill, Oregon, and to many he seemed to have disappeared from the literary scene.*

The 1970s saw both of Kesey's novels made into films. Sometimes a Great Notion *starred Henry Fonda and Paul Newman, who directed it. Kesey had little to do with the immensely successful film* One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest *and says he has never seen it. Since then he has occasionally come back into print with minor works such as* Kesey's Garage Sale. Demon Box, *a collection of experimental stories, was published in 1986. In 1987 and 1988, Kesey led a creative-writing class at the University of Oregon. In order to limit rivalry among students, he decided to have the class members make equal contributions to a novel. The finished work,* Caverns, *was published under the pseudonym O.U. Levon.*

In recent years Kesey has been taking a new bus, Furthur II, on tour and arranging festivals for amateur performers. He has written two books for children, Little Tricker the Squirrel Meets Big Double the Bear *and* The Sea Lion. *He travels around the country giving readings of these works in full Native American costume at children's hospitals and schools. The story of* The Sea Lion *also forms the center of* Sailor Song *(1992), Kesey's first major novel in twenty-eight years. Set in the near future, it is the story of what happens to a small Alaskan fishing village when it is selected as a location by a Hollywood movie company.*

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Kesey and fellow Prankster Ken Babbs have just completed a book about the Pendleton roundup. He has also finished a play, Twister: A Ritual Reality in Four Acts, *which he plans to take on the road.*

This interview was conducted during several visits with Kesey at his Oregon farm in 1992 and 1993. He lives in a spacious barn that was built in the 1930s from a Sears Roebuck catalog. The steps ascending to his loft study are decorated, as are many parts of the barn, in bright Day-Glo colors. Kesey works late into the night, observed, as he points out, by a parliament of owls.

INTERVIEWER

Your only formal studies in fiction were as a fellow in Wallace Stegner's writing program at Stanford. What did you learn from Stegner and also from Malcolm Cowley?

KEN KESEY

The greatest thing Cowley taught me was to respect other writers' feelings. If writing is going to have any effect on people morally, it ought to affect the writer morally. It is important to support everyone who tries to write because their victories are your victories. So I have never really felt that bitter cattiness writers feel toward their peers.

INTERVIEWER

Yet you had a difficult relationship with Stegner. What were the differences between you?

KESEY

Shortly after *Cuckoo's Nest* came out, I did an interview with Gordon Lish for a magazine called *Genesis West*. I don't remember exactly what I said about Stegner, but it made him angry. When I heard he was angry I tried to see him, but his secretary wouldn't let me in. We never spoke again after that. Wally never did like me. At one point, I read that he had said he found me to be ineducable." I had to stew for a long time over what Stegner didn't like about me and my friends.

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We were part of an exceptional group, there's no doubt about it. There was Bob Stone, Gurney Norman, Wendell Berry, Ken Babbs and Larry McMurtry. All of us who were part of that group are still very much in contact; we all support each other's work. Stegner was the great force that brought us all together. He put together a program that ruled literature in California and, in some ways, the rest of the nation for a long time. Stegner had traveled across the Great Plains and reached the Pacific but, as far as he was concerned, that was far enough. Some of us didn't believe that it *was* far enough, and when we went farther than that, he took issue with it, especially when it was not happening in the usual literary bailiwicks that he was accustomed to. I took LSD, and he stayed with Jack Daniel's; the line between us was drawn. That was, as far as he was concerned, the edge of the continent, and he thought you were supposed to stop there. I was younger than he was, and I didn't see any reason to stop, so I kept moving forward, as did many of my friends. Ever since then, I have felt impelled into the future by Wally, by his dislike of what I was doing, of what we were doing. That was the kiss of approval in some way. I liked him, and I actually think that he liked me. It was just that we were on different sides of the fence. When the Pranksters got together and headed off on a bus to deal with the future of our synapses, we knew that Wally didn't like what we were doing, and that was good enough for us. A few years ago, I taught a course at the University of Oregon. I began to appreciate Wally much more after I had been a teacher. Every writer I know teaches—at some point, even if you don't need the money, you have to teach what you were taught, especially if you were taught by a great coach.

INTERVIEWER

Did your experience at Stanford drive you to an anti-intellectual stance?

KESEY

The reason you read great authors—Thomas Paine, Jefferson, Thoreau, Emerson—is not because you really want to

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teach them, though that's one of the things you find yourself doing because you know it's important that they be taught. You study literature because you're a scholar of what's fair. It's just a way of learning how to be what we want to be. We go to concerts to hear a piece by Bach not because we want to be intellectuals or scholars or students of Bach, but because the music is going to help us keep our moral compass needle clean.

INTERVIEWER

What connection is there between Ken Kesey the magician-prankster and Ken Kesey the writer?

KESEY

The common denominator is the joker. It's the symbol of the prankster. Tarot scholars say that if it weren't for the fool, the rest of the cards would not exist. The rest of the cards exist for the benefit of the fool. The fool in tarot is this naive innocent spirit with a rucksack over his shoulder like Kerouac, his eyes up into the sky like Yeats, and his dog biting his rump as he steps over the cliff. We found one once at a big military march in Santa Cruz. Thousands of soldiers marching by. All it took was one fool on the street corner pointing and laughing, and the soldiers began to be uncomfortable, self-conscious. That fool of Shakespeare's, the actor Robert Armin, became so popular that finally Shakespeare wrote him out of *Henry IV*. In a book called *A Nest of Ninnies*, Armin wrote about the difference between a fool artificial and a fool natural. And the way Armin defines the two is important: the character Jack Oates is a true fool natural. He never stops being a fool to save himself; he never tries to do anything but anger his master, Sir William. A fool artificial is always trying to please; he's a lackey. Ronald McDonald is a fool artificial. Hunter Thompson is a fool natural. So was the Little Tramp. Neal Cassady was a fool natural, the best one we knew.

INTERVIEWER

Neal Cassady was a muse to the beats and became one to you as you started writing. When did you first encounter him?

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KESEY

It was 1960. He had just finished the two years he served in the pen. He showed up at my place on Perry Lane when I was at Stanford. He arrived in a Jeep with a blown transmission, and before I was able to get outside and see what was going on, Cassady had already stripped the transmission down into big pieces. He was talking a mile a minute, and there was a crowd of people around him. He never explained why he was there, then or later. He always thought of these events as though he was being dealt cards on a table by hands greater than ours. But that was one of my earliest impressions of him as I watched him running around, this frenetic, crazed character speaking in a monologue that sounded like *Finnegans Wake* played fast forward. He had just started to get involved in the drug experiments at the hospital in Menlo Park, as I had. I thought, "Oh, my God, it could lead to this." I realized then that there was a choice. Cassady had gone down one road. I thought to myself, are you going to go down that road with Burroughs, Ginsberg and Kerouac—at that time still unproven crazies—or are you going to take the safer road that leads to John Updike. Cassady was a hero to all of us who followed the wild road, the hero who moved us all.

INTERVIEWER

Were there literary influences as well?

KESEY

Many of us had read Ginsberg's *Howl*, Kerouac's *On the Road*, Kenneth Rexroth's work, Ferlinghetti's. I knew their work when I was a student at the University of Oregon. I had a tape of Ferlinghetti saying, "I'm sitting now outside of my pool hall watching the hipsters come by in their curious shoes." I wanted to go down to the North Beach area and see Mike's Pool Hall. That's where I met Ken Babbs and Bob Kaufman, a great poet and a casualty of exploration of the synapses.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you think the drug experimentation produced mostly casualties? Do you think Cassady was one?

KESEY

I think most artists who, as the saying goes now, "push the envelope," wind up as casualties. If you think about the history of writers and artists, the best often don't end up with pleasant, comfortable lives; sometimes they go over the edge and lose it. I've been close to enough casualties to learn how to avoid that pitfall. Some critics like to argue that some of the beats had a death wish. Cassady certainly didn't have a death wish. He had a more-than-life wish, an eternity wish. He was trying to recapture, as Burroughs says, the realities he had lost. He was storming the reality studio and trying to take the projector from the controllers who had been running it. When that happens you are bound to have some casualties.

INTERVIEWER

How did Cassady become the driver of your bus, Furthur?

KESEY

Cassady was around us often. There was one incident in particular when he truly impressed me not only as a madman, genius and poet but also as an avatar—someone in contact with other powers. He took me to a racetrack near San Francisco. He was driving and talking very fast, checking his watch frantically, hoping we would get to the track on time. If we got to the track just before the last three races, we'd get in free. We made it just in time, and we bet on the last two races. Cassady had a theory about betting he'd learned in jail from someone named Knee-Walking Jackson. His theory was that the third favorite at post time is often the horse most likely to upset the winner and make big money. Cassady's strategy was to step up to the tellers at the ticket booths just at post time. He'd glance up to see who was third favorite and put money on that horse. He didn't look at the horses, the jockeys or the

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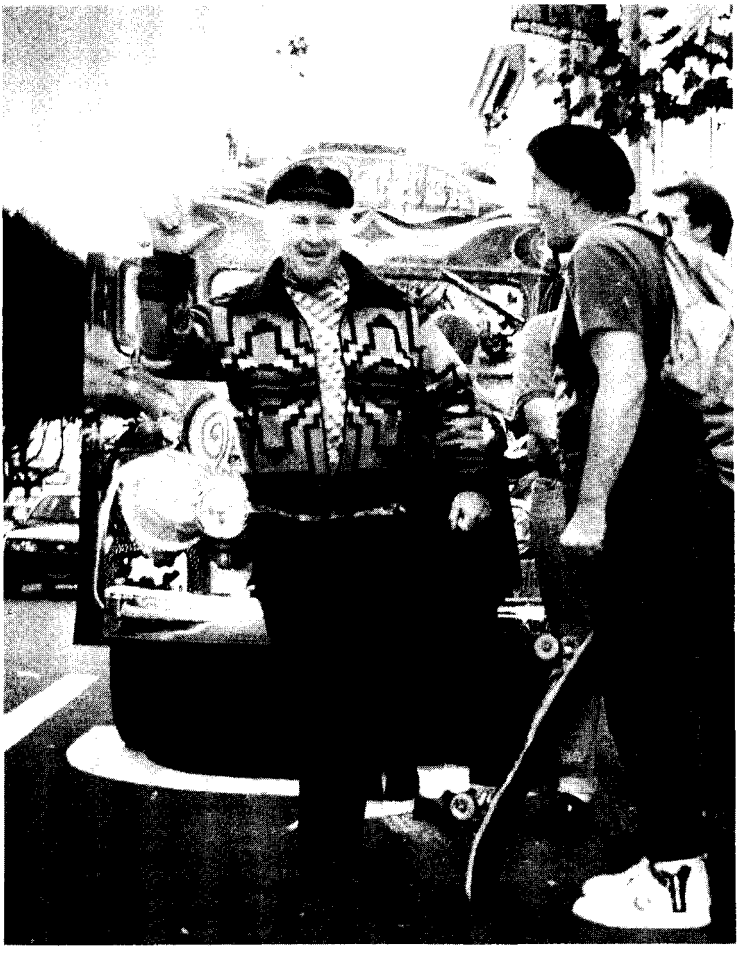

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Kesey in front of the bus.

racing sheets. He said to me, "This is going to be the one, I can feel it." He asked me for ten bucks, and I gave it to him. He put three dollars down with my ten. Given the odds we would have made some good money. We went right down to the line to watch, and it was a close race, neck and neck. I'm no horse fan, but I was getting into it because it looked

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like the third favorite could win. There was a photo finish and Cassady suddenly tore up his tickets and left. I followed him back to the car and could hear the announcement: "We have a photo finish, and the winner is . . ." It turned out to be the favorite. Neal was so confident of his vision that if he lost he never waited around or looked back.

Cassady was a hustler, a wheeler-dealer, a conniver. He was a scuffler. He never had new clothes, but was always clean, and so were his clothes. He always had a toothbrush and was always trying to sell us little things and trying to find a place where he could wash up. Cassady was an elder to me and the other Pranksters, and we knew it. He was literally and figuratively behind the wheel of our bus, driving it the way Charlie Parker worked the saxophone. When he was driving he was improvising an endless monologue about what he was seeing and thinking, what we were seeing and thinking and what we had seen, thought and remembered. Proust was his literary hero, and he would quote long passages from Proust and Melville from memory, lacing his revelations with passages from the Bible. He was a great teacher, and we all knew it and were affected by him.

INTERVIEWER

What did you learn from Cassady?

KESEY

I've listened to the tapes from the bus trip and reread his letters and autobiography—*The First Third*—for years. I've tried to distill his teachings as best I can. The most important lesson is also the most ironic: most of what is important cannot be taught except by experience. His most powerful lesson behind the rap was not to dwell on mistakes. He used the metaphor of driving. He believed that you got into trouble by over-correcting. A certain sloth, he thought, lets you veer into a ditch on the right side of the road. Then you over-correct and hit a car to your left. Cassady believed you had to be correcting every instant. The longer you let things go, the

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longer you stayed comfortable, the more likely the case that you would have to over-correct. Then you would have created a big error. The virtue of continual, engaged experience—an endless and relentless argument with the self—that was his lesson.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think of Wolfe's account of you and the Pranksters in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*?

KESEY

When the galleys came out, we all read through them in one session. I had no major problems with the book then, though I haven't looked at it since. When he was around us, he took no notes. I suppose he prides himself on his good memory. His memory may be good, but it's *his* memory and not mine.

INTERVIEWER

You met Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg at a party in Manhattan during the bus trip. What happened at that encounter?

KESEY

That was the first time I had met Kerouac. It was an important moment for me. I'd known Ginsberg and Dick Alpert—before he became Ram Dass—back at Perry Lane. Ginsberg was good friends with Vik Lovell, the guy who got me involved in the Menlo Park hospital and to whom I dedicated *Cuckoo's Nest*. Ginsberg and Alpert were part of IFIF, the International Federation for Internal Freedom. That was the Millbrook psychological experiment group that included Timothy Leary. Our group on the bus was known as ISIS, the Intrepid Search for Inner Space.

I have thought about that meeting hundreds of times since then. We wanted Kerouac to be the same way he was when

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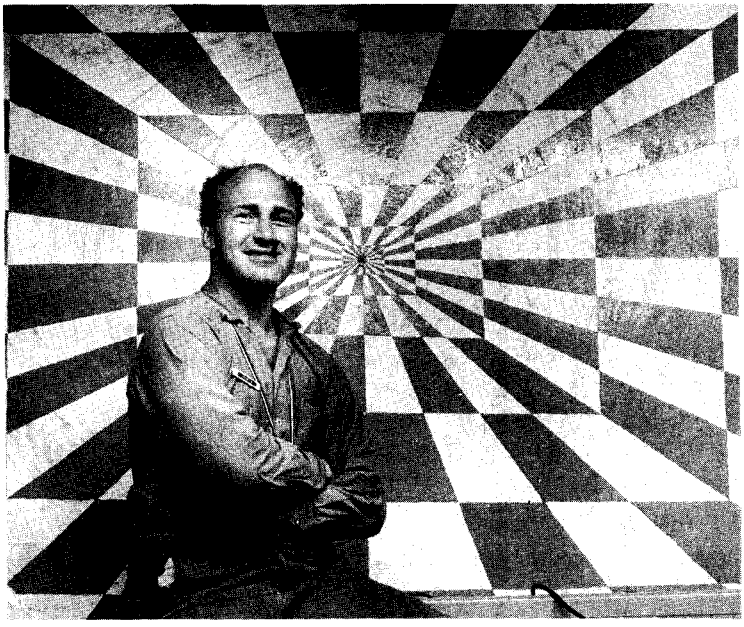
he wrote *On the Road*. I find the same thing happening to me when people show up and expect me to be the way I was twenty-five years ago. Kerouac seemed offended by our wildness, particularly by the way we were wearing American flags draped around our heads. He thought we were being derisive of the United States. But we weren't. We just liked the looks of dressing in the flag. I was disappointed in myself for not going up to him and sincerely expressing how much his work meant to me. But it wasn't the right time, and I needed to say it in a letter.

After Kerouac died, his agent gave me a letter from his wife, Stella. She was very bitter that people had passed Jack by and instead were looking at people like me as the new



Kesey in the San Mateo County Jail in 1967. Shortly after painting this op-art mural on the wall of the tailor shop where he worked, he was demoted to ditch digging.

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literary lions. I wrote her back and told her that I couldn't hold a candle to him. His life's work will stand for centuries. I can't say that about Mailer or Updike or Kosinski. But I believe that people will be reading *On the Road* centuries from now as the true lens into our time.

In his writing Kerouac was true to his vision to the end. He believed there were drama and glory in the most mundane parts of our lives. And all things—running across a football field, the smell of leaves, the sound of a car—became charged with romance in Kerouac's imagination. Kerouac didn't have to have much money, and he didn't have to be famous. But he was part of the ongoing exploration of the American frontier, looking for new land, trying to escape the dust bowls of existence. He had a deep connection to the American romantic vision. Kerouac was a giant to the end, a sad giant. But then giants are usually sad.

INTERVIEWER

How much of Neal Cassady went into the making of Randle P. McMurphy?

KESEY

He's part of the myth. The Irish names—Kesey, Cassady, McMurphy—were all together in my mind as well as a sense of Irish blarney. That's part of the romantic naïveté of McMurphy. But McMurphy was born a long time before I met Neal Cassady. The character of McMurphy comes from Sunday matinees, from American westerns. He's Shane that rides into town, shoots the bad guys, and gets killed in the course of the movie. McMurphy is a particular American cowboy hero, almost two-dimensional. He gains dimension from being viewed through the lens of Chief Bromden's Indian consciousness.

INTERVIEWER

You were working at the Veterans Administration Medical Center in Menlo Park participating in experiments with psy-

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chedelic drugs. How much did those drugs affect you or help you to write *Cuckoo's Nest*?

KESEY

I was taking mescaline and LSD. It gave me a different perspective on the people in the mental hospital, a sense that maybe they were not so crazy or as bad as the sterile environment they were living in. But psychedelics are only keys to worlds that are already there. The images are not there in the white crystals in the gelatin capsule. Drugs don't create characters or stories any more than pencils do. They are merely instruments that help get them on the page.

INTERVIEWER

Do you use LSD or other drugs when you sit down to write?

KESEY

It's impossible for me to write on LSD—there are more important things to think about. Hunter Thompson can do it, but I can't. It's like diving down to look at coral reefs. You can't write about what you've seen until you're back up in the boat. Almost every writer I know drinks to ease the burden of being out on the cliffs, so to speak. But writing under the influence of drugs is a little like a plumber trying to fix the pipes without being able to work the wrench.

I did write the first several pages of *Cuckoo's Nest* on peyote, and I changed very little of it. It had little effect on the plot, but the mood and particularly the voice in those first few pages remained throughout the book. There were also some sections of *Sometimes a Great Notion* written when I was taking mushrooms. Again, the effect is more on mood and voice than on vision. But for the most part, I don't write under the influence of LSD or other drugs.

INTERVIEWER

Do you take notes when you use LSD or other hallucinogens?

KESEY

Yes, sometimes I use a little tape recorder for notes. There's often a big difference between what you think you wrote under

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the influence and what you actually recorded. One time a friend of mine and I were taking LSD and thought we had written "The History and Future of the Universe." What we actually wrote down was something on the order of "If you pick your nose long enough the world will unravel." But often when I am taking LSD, there is an accessing of a universal pool of images, forms that I often find, for example, in Indian art. By the time I started taking peyote and LSD, I had already done a great deal of reading about mysticism—the Bhagavad-gītā and Zen and Christian mystical texts. They helped me to interpret what I was seeing, to give it meaning. You don't just take the stuff and expect understanding. It's also important not to be in a hellish place with LSD or it can be a hellish experience. You need to be in a secure setting.

INTERVIEWER

Do any of the visions you have using LSD get translated into your writing?

KESEY

I'm fond of computer analogies. There are visions written on those programs that are hard to access or convert to the writing programs. I like to take it mostly for the spiritual experience.

INTERVIEWER

Do you recommend LSD as a tool for writing?

KESEY

No.

INTERVIEWER

To go back to *Cuckoo's Nest*, it seems that Chief Bromden's perspective is crucial. What was the origin of his character?

KESEY

Some have described Bromden as schizophrenic. But his is a philosophical craziness, not a clinical illness. I knew Indians who would eat mushrooms and sit and stare at the beach until

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the beach stared back at them. They're not unlike Baudelaire twisting himself so that he could look at flowers in a different way. They're still flowers, and he knows they're flowers but he also sees them as eyes, looking back at him. That's what Chief's craziness is all about. The idea is to regain control of reality so it's no longer presented by public relations people or funneled through a Coca-Cola bottle. The reaction against control is often violent and destructive and lashes out in all directions, even against things that are beneficial. If a man doesn't have a little madness, he never breaks the control-lock that gets placed on reality. It's facing the vast ocean alone, without the safety of land or boat.

My father used to take me to the Pendleton roundup in northern Oregon. He would leave me there for a couple of days. I spent time hanging around the Indians living in the area. I used to take the bus back down through the Columbia River Gorge where they were putting in the Dalles Dam to provide electricity to that part of Oregon so the fields could be irrigated. But it was also going to flood the Celilo Falls, an ancient Indian fishing ground along the Columbia. The government was using scaffolding to build the dam. When I first came to Oregon, I'd see Indians out on the scaffolds with long tridents stabbing salmon trying to get up the falls. The government had bought out their village, moved them across the road where they built new shacks for them. One time, as we got closer to this dam project, we were pulled over by the cops. We were in a big line of traffic. The bus driver got out and walked up to see what was happening. He came back and told us, "One of them crazy drunk Indians took a knife between his teeth and ran out into the highway and into the grill of an oncoming diesel truck, which was bringing conduit and piping to the dam project." I thought, "Boy that's far out." Finally, he couldn't take it anymore. He just had to grab his knife, go out into a freeway and run into a truck. It was really the beginning of *Cuckoo's Nest*—the notion of what you have to pay for a lifestyle. It started an appreciation in me for the Indian sense of justice and drama. I mean, it's

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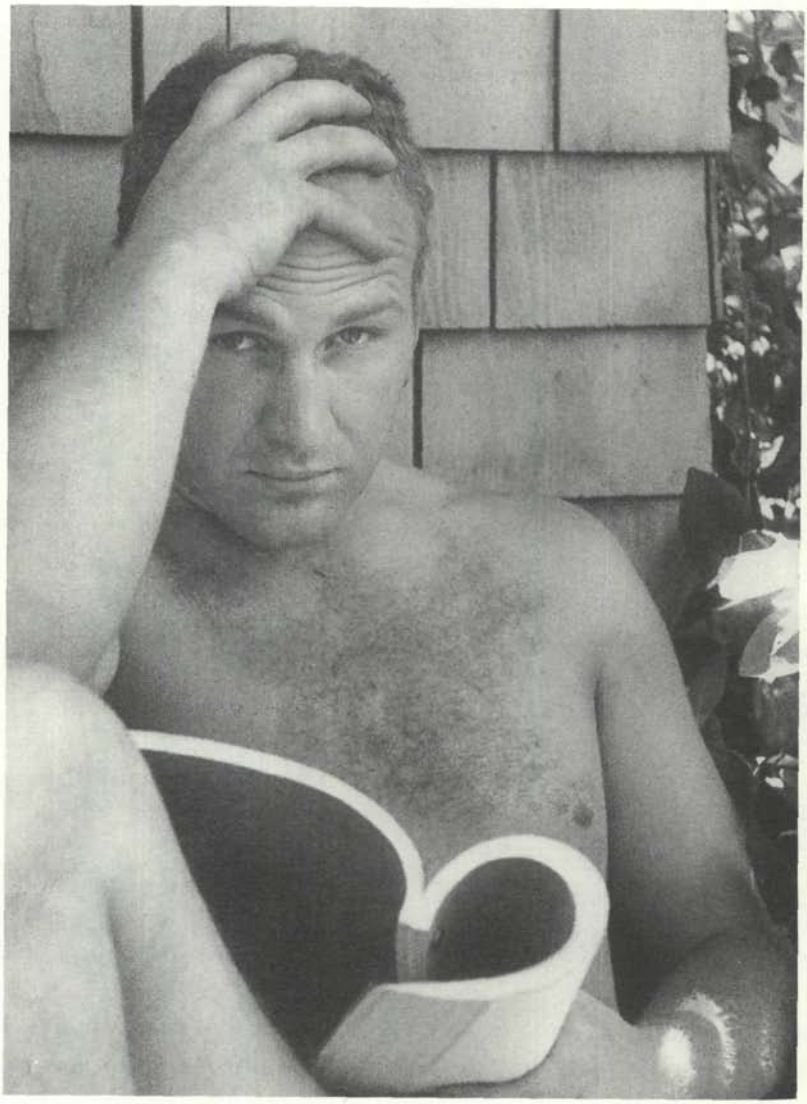

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Kesey reading over the galleys for *One flew over the Cuckoo's Nest.*

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dumb and nasty, but that's class, and the fact that he had the knife between his teeth, that's style. So this Indian consciousness has been very important in all of the stuff that I write. It's not just in *Cuckoo's Nest*. The character Indian Jenny in *Sometimes a Great Notion* is very close to the character of Alice in *Sailor Song*. It is the dispossessed Indian spirit that's trying to reconnect with the white male spirit.

INTERVIEWER

In describing the Native American who hurled himself at the truck, you said he had both class and style. How do you distinguish between class and style?

KESEY

A woman who was a circus acrobat did one act for thirty years. She climbed atop of a 180-foot aluminum pole and stood on her head as her brother balanced her. One day she fell and died, and I remember reading about it in the paper. She fell, the pole fell, because it got too far over, and her brother couldn't keep up with it; he probably stepped on a peanut. She began to fall but she held her pose the whole way down and didn't scream. And of course she must have thought about it thousands of times, "What am I gonna do if it ever gets to the point where I know I can't stop it, it's going to go all the way over and I'm going to die. Can I hold my pose and not scream?" She did, and that's class. Paul Krassner, who was there, told me, "Yeah, but the fact that when she hit, she did the splits, that's style." So class is more important than style but they're connected.

INTERVIEWER

What authors and works do you consider strong embodiments of class and style?

KESEY

Hemingway, because he built his work very rigidly and structured it with a lot of muscle. But Faulkner is so much better. In "The Bear," the prose just tumbles out like water

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out of a spring, especially in that primeval moment when we see a man posed on the back of the bear with the knife, hugging and hanging on. There is class in the character and class in the style. This takes training and discipline beyond anything Hemingway could imagine. This is Faulkner being true to a very deep source and letting it run, letting it go, not perverting it. Hemingway's prose holds up a mirror. He walks around in front of it and works on style. Faulkner's prose doesn't have time for a mirror. It's tumbling and tumbling, and this takes trusting and courage.

Eudora Welty has tremendous class, not just in her work, but in the way she walks, the look in her eyes, the way she has conducted her life. Kerouac had lots of class—stumbling drunk in the end, but read those last books. He never blames anybody else, he always blames himself. If there is a bad guy, it's poor old drunk Jack, stumbling around. You never hear him railing at the government or railing at this or that. He likes trains, people, bums, cars. He just paints a wonderful picture of Norman Rockwell's world. Of course it's Norman Rockwell on a lot of dope.

Jack London had class. He wasn't a very good writer, but he had tremendous class. And nobody had more class than Melville. To do what he did in *Moby-Dick*, to tell a story and to risk putting so much material into it. If you could weigh a book, I don't know any book that would be more full. It's more full than *War and Peace* or *The Brothers Karamazov*. It has Saint Elmo's fire, and great whales, and grand arguments between heroes, and secret passions. It risks wandering far, far out into the globe. Melville took on the whole world, saw it all in a vision, and risked everything in prose that sings. You have a sense from the very beginning that Melville had a vision in his mind of what this book was going to look like, and he trusted himself to follow it through all the way.

INTERVIEWER

What do you see as evil in the world and how do you depict it?

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KESEY

In my novels and stories, evil is always the thing that seems to control. In *Cuckoo's Nest*, it's the combine. In *Sometimes a Great Notion*, it's the symbol of the river, eating away, leveling, trying to make that town the same. In *Demon Box*, the villain is entropy. That natural running-down of energy is the fear that the refrigerator is going to be empty, that we're not going to have enough of something; that fear makes you vulnerable to every kind of scam artist trying to sell a solution. But the real villain is not entropy. It's the notion that entropy is the only choice. And there are a lot of other choices that we can find in religion, philosophy or art.

INTERVIEWER

In *Cuckoo's Nest*, Big Nurse is often regarded as the embodiment of evil. Do you think that is an accurate representation of her?

KESEY

Recently, I was over in Newport, at the opening of the Oregon Coast Aquarium, which has been seven years in the making. I was performing *The Sea Lion* in the Newport Performing Arts Center. Afterwards a white-haired old woman approached me and said, "Hey, you remember me?" I looked her over, and I knew I remembered her, but had no idea who she was. She said, "Lois." It still didn't click. She said, "Lois Learned, Big Nurse," and I thought, "Oh my God." She was a volunteer at Newport, long since retired from the nursing business. This was the nurse on the ward I worked on at the Menlo Park hospital. I didn't know what to think, and she didn't either, but I was glad she came up to me. I felt there was a lesson in it, the same one I had tried to teach Hollywood. She's not the villain. She might be the minion of the villain, but she's really just a big old tough ex-Army nurse who is trying to do the best she can, according to the rules that she has been given. She worked for the villain and believed in the villain, but she ain't the villain.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you believe that individuals have to be held accountable for evil, even if they are not the ultimate source?

KESEY

I may, as they say in jail, hang the jacket on them, but I'm not the judge. I can expose something, but as you get older and hopefully wiser, you find that blame and punishment beget only more blame and punishment. I'm probably, from another person's point of view, the Big Nurse in somebody else's story. The thing that changes as you get older is your belief that certain people are bad forever or good forever. We're not. It wouldn't make any sense to write if we were. With blame, you either resist it or you pick up rocks and throw them at who's to blame. Wendell Berry talks about that when he says we all have the capacity to do evil but we have to learn to forebear it. What keeps us from being monsters are Emerson and Thoreau and the Beatles and Bob Dylan—great artists who teach us to love and hold off on the hurt. The hurt is inside of us, and of course we can always randomly hurt something, but a great artist will teach you to love a thing and not want to possess it or alter it—just to love it. You finally have to love Big Nurse. It's the symbol behind her, the combine, that makes her do what she does. You've got to fight that, but finally you have to love them all—the poor, broken human beings, even the worst of them.

INTERVIEWER

Your novels have been popular in eastern Europe and translated in the former communist-block countries. How do you account for that?

KESEY

They were allowed in all the communist-block countries because the authorities considered them anti-American. Totalitarians never see themselves as being totalitarians; they always see that in the other guys. And *Cuckoo's Nest* is, to some extent, anti-American. It's about American terror. Big

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Nurse works for an American bad-guy, the combine, the inhuman part of American industrialism.

INTERVIEWER

Why did you break off from writing the screenplay for *Cuckoo's Nest*?

KESEY

I was contracted to do the screenplay, but they wanted me to do it a certain way, leaving out the narrative thread of Chief's perspective and making Big Nurse the center of evil. And there were other disputes.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think of the movie?

KESEY

I've never seen it. We were arguing with lawyers, and the issue was whether I had been paid adequately. I was fussing with them. They said, "Why are you coming on like that, you'll be the first in line to see that movie." I said, "I swear to God I'll never see that movie." I did it in front of the lawyers, and I'd hate to go to heaven and have these two lawyers calling me on it. I mean, to lie to a lawyer, that's low.

INTERVIEWER

Do you see the inhuman evil present in nature?

KESEY

No, evil is part of the human consciousness. A baboon may get a harem and rape and hurt, then some other baboon will tear that baboon up eventually. It's part of baboonery, and it's gonna be there. The evil force isn't interested in baboons or daisies. The evil force wants to hang human souls on its walls for some reason, and I don't think of it as satanic. It's lukewarm. As Christ says, hot and cold are cool, but evil is lukewarm, and it's a drag.

When I see bad-looking bikers with black leather studs on their wrists hanging out at the Oregon Country Fair, I take

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it as a sign of health. No, I don't want them hanging around, but trying to eliminate them all, arrest them all, legislate against them all—that's evil. I have asked feminists, "If you could, would you eliminate all male chauvinist pigs? If you could come up with some kind of spray to spray in the air and do away with them, would you? Would you do away with all scorpions and rattlesnakes, mosquitoes?" Mosquitoes are part of the ecosystem. So are male chauvinist pigs. You've got to fight them, but you don't try to exterminate them. A purifying group or system that would eliminate them all—that would be an evil force. Anytime you have a force that comes along and says, "We will eradicate these people," you have evil. Looking back in history, what has seemed the worst turns out not to be the worst. Imagine how the Catholics must have talked about Galileo, how he must have seemed a great evil to them. But as time went on, it turned out that he was not only a good human being but good for the Catholic church.

INTERVIEWER

Your heroes are often little warriors against big enemies. If the writer is a "warrior," who is his enemy?

KESEY

When I begin to try to follow the money, as they say in *All the President's Men*, up the evil ladder, past the businessmen, past the Mafia, past the leaders in the state, I ask, "Who is doing the stuff, who is pulling the cords?" It looks an awful lot like God. It's the big fascist in the sky. But all of this religion, government and civilization bending towards God is dangerous. There's nothing worse for a forest than to have all the trees be the same. So you think, well maybe this isn't God. Maybe this is the famous Antichrist who's been the bad guy all along. The good guys, the real God, are hippies in tie-dyes out at the Oregon Country Fair, who are providing a sprinkle of mischief and chaos to keep things from becoming mud all over. As Burroughs says, the job of the writer is that of an exterminator. You're trying to battle the evil bugs that

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have crawled into our works and get in the way of exploring the hollow. Zora Neale Hurston and Louise Erdrich are good examples of warriors. So is Tom Robbins. People laugh and point at him, but that's just because he's on the west coast, and he won't dress up in the right clothes. His prose is like that motley that the fool wears, and it's easy to be impatient with him, but he's a warrior the same way that old Hunter Thompson is a warrior.

INTERVIEWER

Are there other contemporary evils for which you believe the writer has to account?

KESEY

In Kurt Vonnegut's book *Cat's Cradle* the worst thing that ever happens to a marine is mud, and there is a thing called *ice-nine* that you can add to mud to solidify it. But then all the mud around the world starts to go solid. We have to try to fight anything that is going to create solid mud worldwide.

INTERVIEWER

Sometimes a Great Notion begins and ends with the image of Henry Stamper's amputated arm with its middle finger extended. Did you structure the book around this image?

KESEY

The image of the amputated arm came to me before I knew whose arm it was. Writing the book was the way to figure out who belonged to the arm and why. In writing the book I figured out what the symbol meant. First, I thought that Stamper was the hero, fighting the union's attempt to control the family. But in retrospect, the river is the controlling force the family is battling. The Stamper brothers, Hank and Lee, are matching wills and egos over Vivian. When Vivian leaves at the end, she leaves the people she loves for a dark future, but one in which she isn't controlled. Mother Nature throws off the forces that try to control her. Old feminism, women's

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lib, had something to do with that, but I didn't know it at the time.

INTERVIEWER

Sometimes a Great Notion is much more ambitious than *Cuckoo's Nest*. Do you think it is as successful?

KESEY

It's my best work, and I'll never write anything that good again. It's a question of time spent on it. I worked on *Notion* for two years without interruption, exploring symbols and characters and letting the narrative take its own way.

INTERVIEWER

Did you have a model for the narrative experimentation in *Sometimes a Great Notion*?

KESEY

Orson Welles's film *The Magnificent Ambersons* influenced *Sometimes a Great Notion* quite a lot in its ability to move narrative along by going from situation to situation with just a few lines of dialogue by one of the characters. Someone would say the next thing we needed to know, and there would be a cut to that shot. The first part of *The Magnificent Ambersons* covers quite a long period in a very short time, and you get to see the characters in a structured, stylized way—they step out on stage and deliver lines that help with the exposition. That influenced me in terms of structure.

INTERVIEWER

After *Sometimes a Great Notion*, you set out on the bus, Furthur. What did you want to explore?

KESEY

What I explore in all my work: wilderness. I like that saying of Thoreau's that "in wilderness is the preservation of the world." Settlers on this continent from the beginning have

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been seeking that wilderness and its wildness. The explorers and pioneers were out on the edge, seeking that wildness because they could sense that in Europe everything had become locked tight with things. The things were owned by all the same people, and all of the roads went in the same direction forever. When we got here there was a sense of possibility and new direction, and it had to do with wildness. Throughout the work of James Fenimore Cooper there is what I call the American terror. It's very important to our literature, and it's important to who we are: the terror of the Hurons out there, the terror of the bear, the avalanche, the tornado—whatever may be over the next horizon. It could be the biggest, most awful thing in the world. As we came to the end of the continent, we manufactured our terror. We put together the bomb. Now even that bomb is betraying us. We don't have the bomb hanging over our heads to terrify us and give us reason to dress up in manly deerskin and go forth to battle it. There's something we're afraid of, but it doesn't have the clear delineation of the terror the Hurons gave us or the hydrogen bomb in the cold war. It's fuzzy, and it's fuzzy because the people who are in control don't want you to draw a bead on the real danger, the real terror in this country.

INTERVIEWER

What is the "real terror" in America?

KESEY

When people ask me about LSD, I always make a point of telling them you can have the shit scared out of you with LSD because it exposes something, something hollow. Let's say you have been getting on your knees and bowing and worshipping; suddenly, you take LSD, and you look, and there's just a hole, there's nothing there. The Catholic church fills this hole with candles and flowers and litanies and opulence. The Protestant church fills it with hand-wringing and pumped-up squeezing emotions because they can't afford the flowers and the candles. The Jews fill this hole with weeping and browbeating and

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beseeching of the sky: "How long, how long are you gonna treat us like this?" The Muslims fill it with rigidity and guns and a militant ethos. But all of us know that's not what is supposed to be in that hole. After I had been at Stanford two years, I was into LSD. I began to see that the books I thought were the true accounting books—my grades, how I'd done in other schools, how I'd performed at jobs, whether I had paid off my car or not—were not at all the true books. There were other books that were being kept, real books. In those real books is the real accounting of your life. And the mind says, "Oh, this is titillating." So you want to take some more LSD and see what else is there. And soon I had the experience that everyone who's ever dabbled in psychedelics has. A big hand grabs you by the back of the neck, and you hear a voice saying, "So you want to see the books. Okay, here are the books." And it pushes your face right down into all of your cruelties and all of your meanness, all the times that you have been insensitive, intolerant, racist, sexist. It's all there, and you read it. That's what you're really stuck with. You can't take your nose up off the books. You hate them. You hate who you are. You hate the fact that somebody has been keeping track, just as you feared. You hate it, but you can't move your arms for eight hours. Before you take any acid again you start trying to juggle the books. You start trying to be a little better person. Then you get the surprise. The next thing that happens is that you're leaning over looking at the books, and you feel the lack of the hand at the back of your neck. The thing that was forcing you to look at the books is no longer there. There's only a big hollow, the great American wild hollow, that is scarier than hell, scarier than purgatory or Satan. It's the fact that there isn't any hell or there isn't any purgatory, there isn't any Satan. And all you've got is Sartre sitting there with his momma—harsh, bleak, worse than guilt. And if you've got courage, you go ahead and examine that hollow. That's the wilderness that I've always wanted to explore, and it's connected to the idea of freedom, but it's a terrifying freedom. I'm working on a book called "The Seven Prayers of Grandma

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Whittier." The idea is to take someone who is a very strong, very devout Christian and put her into a situation in which she loses her faith and show how she wrestles and comes back from this hollow. And so my grandma, who's a hundred years old this year, and I are in some way linked in an excursion into her dark hole of Alzheimer's. You know she must *be* something even though she can't remember the Lord's Prayer or read the Bible anymore. She's alive, but that's it. You can go into that hollow and still come out of it and have a positive life.

INTERVIEWER

And that hollow is, for you, the new wilderness?

KESEY

That's the new wilderness. It's the same old wilderness, just no longer up on that hill or around that bend, or in the gully. It's the fact that there is no more hill or gully, that the hollow is there and you've got to explore the hollow with faith. If you don't have faith that there is something down there, pretty soon when you're in the hollow, you begin to get scared and start shaking. That's when you stop taking acid and start taking coke and drinking booze and start trying to fill the hollow with depressants and Valium. Real warriors like William Burroughs or Leonard Cohen or Wallace Stevens examine the hollow as well as anybody; they get in there, look far into the dark and yet come out with poetry.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever felt that you were going too far into void, getting too twisted to come out?

KESEY

Many times I feel I have been way out, but I always come back. I have my family, my wife, Faye, the farm, chickens and cows. The earthly world calls out to you in clear voices that you must come back. Those earthly voices are far better than anything I've heard crying in the night.

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INTERVIEWER

After *Sometimes a Great Notion*, you seem to have grown dissatisfied with the novel as a medium. Do you prefer public performance?

KESEY

Yes. The first rule—whether you are a writer or a dancer or a fiddle player or a painter is—don't bore people. My dad used to say that good writing ain't necessarily good reading. A lot of people think good writing is like the compulsories in figure skating; it goes round in circles and doesn't go anywhere. If I'm going to skate, I'm going to race.

At one point, I was trying to write an illuminated novel with pictures and different kinds of print, experimenting with visual form as well as prose form. It's not right yet. But I haven't felt like I have taken a vacation from my work. I feel that I am continuing to probe into that big hollow, but the traditional form of the novel won't do. My metaphor has been that I've been dating Emily Brontë, and the old dame just ain't putting out like she used to. The novel is a noble, classic form but it doesn't have the juice it used to. If Shakespeare were alive today he'd be writing soap opera, daytime TV or experimenting with video. That's where the audience is. The audience is there even if there's a lot of mediocrity in the writing. I have just completed a play, *Twister*. Writing drama for a live audience is exciting, almost addictive.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think of when you think of an audience?

KESEY

I was in a quandary about my audience when I was working on *Notion* until I realized that I'm not writing for the east coast literary establishment. I am writing for Mountain Girl and Jerry Garcia's oldest girl, Annabelle—she's a great Stephen King fan. She just reads and reads. She likes something that's got a little zip to it. At one point, I realized that's whom I'm

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writing for. If Annabelle Garcia reads this book, gets excited and grins about it, then I have hit my audience, and all the rest just ricochets.

INTERVIEWER

Some of your most recent works have been children's stories, *Little Tricker the Squirrel Meets Big Double the Bear*, as well as *The Sea Lion*, which also appears as part of your recent novel, *Sailor Song*. What are the attractions and challenges of writing for children?

KESEY

When you go into the arena before a group of kids you don't care what Christopher Lehmann-Haupt said about you in previous reviews in *The New York Times*. Your strokes are broader, because all the little fine brush lines are lost on a kid. But the message beneath them has to be clearer. In a kid's story like *Pinocchio* the message is clearly communicated—if you lie your nose gets bigger. In a novel you have to conceal it, or you're accused of being too obvious. When you're writing for kids all you have to have is a good story; it will be accepted. Also, you can tell whether it works when you read it to a kid. It's hard for a writer to tell when a novel works.

INTERVIEWER

When you were five your maternal grandmother, Grandma Smith, told you the original story of Little Tricker.

KESEY

What I remember most about the way she told the story are the repetitions, the series of threes in the events, the alliteration in the language. She taught me the speech rhythms that are essential to being a good storyteller. There is a drumbeat, in which you have to get your idea across in a breath. She also taught me a great deal about irony. When you think of irony you've got to think of an outside force looking in. Irony doesn't exist without a god of some kind. Irony is not a trait

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many kids learn. It's not just God sitting up there laughing at you; there's the whole universe sort of grinning wryly at you. The main point she taught me is how essential wonder is to a storyteller. The storyteller himself has to feel wonder in order to communicate it. Somehow I don't think that sense of mystery can be taught to you by your parents. It has to be taught by your grandparents or perhaps your aunts and uncles.

INTERVIEWER

Did Grandma Smith inspire you to become a writer?

KESEY

It was all part of doing magic shows when I was a kid. For one thing, you have to talk, explain things as you go along. I would go to farm producers' meetings with my dad and perform tricks for farmers and their kids. I always found a mean little redheaded kid in the audience. I would get him up on the stage and announce that I was going to tell a story about the pasteurization of milk. Chuck, my brother, helped me with an ice pick and a funnel. I pretended to bore a hole in the top of this kid's head with the ice pick, explaining that you had to use redheads because they are a whole lot more hotheaded than most people, and I poured the milk on top of his head, letting it run past his eyes, and explaining how when it comes down out your elbow, it's pure. Then I'd pump the milk out the elbow. A story went with each magic act, and the stories enhanced the act. This is what a shaman does; he has a little story, and a few tricks along with it, a dance, some drumbeats, a painted set and some beads strung together. Writing is just one of those parts. It has been elevated to the point that people think it is the "thing." It isn't. Shakespeare doesn't come alive until it's on stage. It's about performance.

INTERVIEWER

Sailor Song is your first novel in twenty-eight years. Do you consider it a comeback?

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KESEY

Michael Douglas said to me when we were talking about doing a stage version of *Cuckoo's Nest*, "Oh yeah, this would be a great comeback." I said, "Good God, I didn't know I'd gone anywhere." I feel what I did with the bus, what I'm doing with my new play *Twister*, the political activity around here, reading these stories in children's hospitals, is all part of the same work. You put on a different costume. But you're always a shaman. The fire pit changes its shape. The fire gets more civilized when you're doing a reading back at the St. Mark's Church In-The-Bowery, but you're still a shaman. I haven't slacked off at all. But it has been really important and tremendously gratifying for me to finish a big book because no matter what you say, every writer knows that the novel is the bear and, as Faulkner says, every so often the dog has to go against the bear just to keep calling itself the dog. I set out to do this book in the early 1980s but got dragged away, mainly when my son Jed was killed. That really took the wind out of my sails. During that time I did a lot of other things that were just ways of avoiding this book. I brought out *Demon Box*, a compilation of stories about the farm and the bus in what I think of as the comedown years—my gonzo time. But Viking wanted me to use my name and everybody's real names. *Demon Box* is fiction, although not many people would appreciate the fact that some of the stories happened and some of them didn't. "The Furthur Inquiry," a screenplay about the bus, turned up in a box back at Viking. *Caverns*, a collaborative novel from a writing class I taught at the University of Oregon, was brought out. So these books came out as I was trying to avoid getting back to *Sailor Song*.

INTERVIEWER

What was the genesis of *Sailor Song*? You published *The Sea Lion*, the children's story which appears in *Sailor Song*, before the novel. Did one precede the other or did they evolve together?

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KESEY

When I began *Sailor Song* I didn't have the story thought out, just the vision of what happens when a movie company comes to a little Alaskan town and takes it over. I needed a story within the story; I wanted it to be an ancient-seeming story, around which the larger tale could be folded. Then, as Larry McMurtry says, it was the job of the fiction writer to make stuff up, so I made up *The Sea Lion*. Although the two stories pretty much evolved together, the ideas behind *The Sea Lion* began when my brother and I went up to see an Indian storyteller in Washington up on the slopes of Mount Saint Helens. A family called Laluska makes masks up there. Those Northwest Indian images are tremendously powerful and as yet pretty much unused. They haven't been bled dry like many of the images from the Plains Indians and from the Ojibwa art back on the east coast. I saw that there was a terrific power to these faces and masks, especially the eyes. You could see that it came from the way wood knotholes are worked by surf, giving them the look of leather. They have taken it and styled it beautifully so that you can see that surf-worn quality more clearly. This was in some way connected to the story. You can't really separate the mask and the look from the story and the performance. Just hanging a mask on the wall makes it a piece of art in the museum, but if you put it on and use it as part of a story, then the story comes alive; the mask comes alive. The look of these masks was the way I wanted my work to look in the reader's mind. Fiction is when you twist what's out in front of you and stylize it so it's more clearly seen by the reader—just the same way that the Indian carvers can create an eye that looks more like an eye than an eye—a fictional eye that enables you to see better than the true eye did. That's what good fiction is always about. Reading *Moby-Dick*, you see a whale more clearly than you could see him by going over to the coast and watching through a pair of binoculars. It's the stylization of the whales that lets you see inside and outside of them, their mythical as well as their mundane qualities.

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INTERVIEWER

In the title essay of *Demon Box*, you express remorse about the intrusion of the filmmaker and the artist's eye into both private suffering and uncorrupted wilderness. The effect of Hollywood on an Alaskan town is the dramatic center of *Sailor Song*. Have you come to view the film industry as an evil?

KESEY

Well, writers have always had a real love-hate relationship with Hollywood. Even if your book sells really well, you don't make that much money out of it unless Hollywood picks it up. So you want Hollywood's attention, yet you don't want it. There's a saying, often attributed to Hemingway, that sums up my feeling about having your novel turned into a film: "I don't like to see my bull turned into a bullion cube." In *Sailor Song*, I'm not really trying to put Hollywood down. It's just another force moving on this earth. It has its benefits and it's a nuisance. We know movies better than novels. Most writers have seen more movies than they've read books. It is the common denominator, two hours of story. Sometimes you'll get something that will go well into a miniseries like Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove*. The miniseries is not a bad form because the story can be developed in a leisurely way.

INTERVIEWER

Has the vanishing of the frontier and wilderness changed what it means to create an American hero?

KESEY

In western novels, especially Zane Grey novels, there is a code of the West that the hero and most of the characters in the novels adhere to. It has to do with fairness, courage, but in a lot of ways I think it mostly has to do with forgiveness. A guy in a Zane Grey novel can be a real bad outlaw, running with the bad bunch, but he comes up against a woman who changes his heart and his ways, and the good guys who have been after him accept him back into the fold. The code of

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the West is that you may have done a lot of bad stuff in the past but you can always turn over a new leaf at any point and change. The problem now is that the good guys aren't the good guys anymore. You don't want to turn over a new leaf and become part of society because you've seen society's dirty underwear, and it isn't much better than the bad guys' dirty underwear. Then you drop out of the hero business.

INTERVIEWER

In *Sailor Song* there is a conflict about how to read the Indian story, "The Sea Lion." One character sees it as meaningless for American audiences looking for symbols and plots. Do you believe stories should have a discernible meaning?

KESEY

I'm for mystery, not interpretive answers. When I was working on *Caverns*, I found out that one of the problems was that students kept looking for the answers to symbolic riddles and believed that modern fiction is supposed to supply you with the answer. The answer is never the answer. What's really interesting is the mystery. If you seek the mystery instead of the answer, you'll always be seeking. I've never seen anybody really find the answer, but they think they have. So they stop thinking. But the job is to seek mystery, evoke mystery, plant a garden in which strange plants grow and mysteries bloom. The need for mystery is greater than the need for an answer.

INTERVIEWER

How did the class show its desire to provide an answer?

KESEY

One student tried to tie *Caverns* up in a Buddhistic bag. There were thirteen of us contributing to the book. Without telling any of us, he introduced into the last chapter four pages of material that was pure Diamond Sutra; it came from the Rajneesh. He was a disciple all along, and he had been keeping this in his mind. His answer was the same kind of dogma

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that people spout when they think the answer is Christ or environmental awareness. Anytime they do that they're already joining with the forces of *ice-nine*-hard mud.

INTERVIEWER

What was your response to the student writer?

KESEY

After his reading, the class was just ready to string him up. He had violated one of the most important taboos in writing fiction. "What are you gonna to do to him?," someone asked. I said, "We're not going to do anything. We're not gonna talk about it. We won't speak of it. We will not ever speak again of this to him at all." He came in the door and he said, "What do you think of my new piece?" So we didn't speak of it. The last week of class went on, and he began to get a strange look in his eyes. We had sent him to some kind of literary Coventry. It had to be taken care of because what I had told the class in the beginning of year was that I was going to try to teach them the job of the serious writer in modern America as best I could. It was my last day of class, and I was trying to give some kind of closing lecture to tie this up in a little package they could take home with them. I told them they had all read and studied, that they could all write. They knew fiction far better than I did. If there had been a test, they'd have just walked all over me because they knew the history of literature and the history of style better than I did. But I told them, "So you guys can write, and well enough that one of these days you're going to have a visitation. You're going to be walking down the street and across the street you're going to look and see God standing over there on the street corner motioning to you, saying, 'Come to me, come to me.' And you will know it's God, there will be no doubt in your mind—he has slitty little eyes like Buddha, and he's got a long nice beard and blood on his hands. He's got a big Charlton Heston jaw like Moses, he's stacked like Venus, and he has a great jeweled scimitar like Mohammed. And God will

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tell you to come to him and sing his praises. And he will promise that if you do, all of the muses that ever visited Shakespeare will fly in your ear and out of your mouth like golden pennies. It's the job of the writer in America to say, 'Fuck you God, fuck you and the Old Testament that you rode in on, fuck you.' The job of the writer is to kiss no ass, no matter how big and holy and white and tempting and powerful. Anytime anybody says come to me and says, 'Write my advertisement, be my ad manager,' tell him, 'Fuck you.'" The job is always to be exposing God as the crook, as the sleaze ball. Nelson Algren says the job of the writer in America is to pull the judge down into the docket, get the person who is high down where he's low, make him feel what it's like where it's low.

INTERVIEWER

Do you believe that an author imposes his own cultural vision on his readers in this way?

KESEY

I think that the artist should feel obligated to force whatever he can upon his audience and be the authority because if he doesn't, some advertising man will. Ronald McDonald will be out there telling people what to think. The cynic who says, "Oh, none of this counts anymore," is wrong. I can remember when I thought that too. But the older you get, the more you see people in the past who have thoughts that last. Things you think you're saying for the first time ever, have been said better before by Shakespeare, though they may need saying again. As Faulkner says, there are the old verities. Revenge is about the same as it always was.

—Robert Faggen

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Five Poems by Stephen Sandy

Threads

Bolts

The logs of wool jersey plastered with labels
Lay in the lint and litter, columns in a heap
Like a Doric temple left at the shipping dock,
Trucked in from Dan River.
They smelled so sweet,
Concentric rings like cross sections of a tree;
But these would shrink, unwound on the cutting block
Long as an alley to the boy who wheeled them in.
Whistling finale, faille unrolled on the table's
Spotlit runway, layer on layer, flat
For the cutter's saw following paper template
To carve out panels of dresses, thirty deep.
That trade, like subsistence farming through thick and thin;
The rounds of seasons, this year's style or that
Year's loss; core sample of eternity.

1945

Ribbed faille sings out when it unrolls across
Itself; bolt after bolt lay up, unite
For the blade of Izzy, like a doctor dressed in white,
Sleeves starchly rolled up burly arms; the hum
And glitter of the little circular knife
Softly screaming through reds and tawny umbers
And a sheaf of special orders, orchid and plum;
Glazed taffeta slides, but wool packs tight like moss

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For the muscular fist gripping the steel. Rosa,
Testy assistant, baleful refugee,
Helps Izzy—and only Yiddish between them. She
Must keep one sleeve rolled over the indigo
Tattoo; but after work would show its numbers,
Inky brand of her undeniable life.

Shipping Boy

Bald Applebaum of Shipping sampling lunch,
Your Virgil and your boss down those dark aisles,
From his wire cage—riffling through order files
With a licked finger—barked: forget it, the Punch
And Judy!—whatever looked too good to him
He called *the Punch & Judy*. Crocodile's
Tears, that was her *shtick*; and then the smiles!
It was all *chutzpah*, Rosa playing it so grim.
He stirred his soup with awful satisfaction,
Stirring with pride or failure—hoping to score
From the dark of the back office—warned: she taunts
You; she's a designer; you are the attraction;
The boss's boy better get over it before
She bares you her arm and gets just what she wants.

Lunchbox

Tin lunchbox open, she smokes and watches out
The eighth floor window. Pigeon; sky; one cloud.
Watches her forearm and sees nothing but—
Nothing. Dull parchment of untanned skin.
What morning music is this place about
She wonders, as the distance they've allowed
Her grows in this limbo where the door is shut
On the living; for now is for the dead, for kin,

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For smoke and looking down at odors, where sweet-
Smelling threads and swags of lint coax a cough.
The numbers do not float away like dust,
Lint dust that swirls with operators' sweat
Billowing from machines someone turns off;
These strange "girls," how innocent and robust.

Photo of Melville; Back Room, Old Bookstore

I passed him by at first. From the photograph
Peered sepia eyes, blindered, unappeased
From a lair of brows and beard: one not amazed
At anything, as if to have looked enough
Then turned aside worked best for him—as if
Night vision was the discipline that eased
The weight of what he saw. A man's gaze posed
Too long in the sun goes blank; comes to grief.
That face could be a focus for this back room,
For pack-rat papers strewn as if in rage,
Fond notes unread: each wary eye a phial
Unstoppered to let huge Melville out, to calm
The sea of pages; Melville in older age:
The grown man's sleepy defiance of denial.

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Hard By

Taking the Westward walk at sundown now
She looks across the field back of the house
And catches liquid reflections of the sun
That sets in her windows, tingling sockets aflame,
Fake little conflagrations mimicking how
Everything might go—interiors shake loose,
Belongings turn to shadows one by one.
There stood the chest she loved, and oak bedstead;
Corners familiar things brightened become
Ash-white; the sash and lights now faceted
With crimsons lapping. As good as gone, the rooms
They'd soundly slept in, and the locked front door.
But the sun will set, she knows; its ruddy dooms
Be snuffed like matches, low windows dark once more.

Denny

We sensed the words he used he didn't quite
Have meanings for. When he did well, we felt
He faltered where it didn't show, inside;
Yet forged ahead like a child who grows in the night,
Spellbound. He'd hang in there, for ice would melt
Under pressure, even a river of ice. He tried
Himself
        but now when he looks over his
Fine shoulder he sees—another self; two men
Competing there, and neither ever thanks
The other. He finds how slow a glacier is
After the ribbons and the promises
And father waiting on him, waiting again;
His years line up there in receding ranks
Like so many doubting Thomases.

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Force of Nature

Facing the music of desires you
Forgot what would become of you; blew it
Like the Iceman climbing in the clamor of a blizzard
On the Otztal Alp five thousand years ago.
Yearning was fuel; yet the white-out buried the climber,
His possessions, chalcolithic gear.
The rest—
What trade, what life, what promise he was keeping,
What valley of satisfaction he pressed on to reach—
Puzzle us; we only see how he wanted to get
Somewhere, wanted but could not and gave back
Everything. No one knows where he was headed,
Why so forlorn, what it was all about;
Only that he, like you, had dealt with desire
As it was, a force of nature; and had lost.

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Kjell Espmark

Route Tournante

Cézanne has placed a surly easel
in what is still not there.
He feels the geology of absence,
layer upon layer, so well that even bare
fields of canvas are quite authentic.

The road that turns in last year's grass
is still just a bend in the mind,
stolen from an old Chinese.
It begins in a soiled chapter
he has scraped away with his knife—
you were never there!

Begin with the shadows
and work towards the lightening middle.
The blue-gray may tempt back a field.

Like his life this treacherous year:
the throbbing foot that will not heal
contemplates deserting him.
While the road insists anew—
what thirst for sun!

Among women in dark headcloths,
his mother, bowed in the grief of the dead.
As the others vanish beyond the bend
she makes excuses to stay,
like a misty blue on the road.

How hard to endure another's touch—

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It is the color that may touch the world.
Naturally he has mentioned the logic. And the cone.
But those are approximate values.
No theory can take hold of
the raging forces inside things.
Only a grasp of colors
can force "reality" to an answer.

Patch upon patch, a stubborn gamut,
extracting a village from the village:
gables, church tower, a possible road
and a fugue of swallows.
Every house is uninhabited: waiting
for whoever can make his way back.

A day is a year.

Like his life—
took decades to see that verdure is blue.
And now he has succeeded in a few minutes
in painting the sound of bells.

The paintbrush lowers.
The canvas has forced out a landscape
in what only calls itself landscape.
And the road really does turn.
Every second has a moist gleam
none could see before.
He stands with his throbbing ache
in suddenly fresh last year's grass.

—translated from the Swedish
by Joan Tate

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Bernard Cooper

Tone Poem

I wish I had one of those electronic keyboards where you can plug in pre-recorded sounds that correspond to different keys. I'd compose an homage to insomnia—barking dogs and hammer blows and car alarms played over and over, the inverse of a lullaby, a score without a shred of respite. Try and get that tune out of your head. Or how about a nocturne for the aging body—the rumble of digestive juices, the suction of shoes that are pried from tired feet, the barely audible crackle of static as a brush is drawn through thinning hair. If only I'd had the foresight to tape-record every interesting snippet of conversation I've overheard in my long lifetime, by now I would have accumulated enough cryptic remarks, brilliant quips, and pretentious asides to pound out symphonic octaves of talk. I could pepper the punchline to my father's favorite joke— ". . . and the third nun says, 'Move over girls, I've got to gargle,'"—with scales of his helpless laughter. Here's an étude in which my absentminded mother keeps clearing her throat, and though she can't remember what she wanted to say, the ensuing silence is provocative, poignant, as sinewy and rich as a complex sentence.

Just to hear me practice any one of the tunes in my rapidly expanding repertoire would be like stomping through a minefield of burps, doorbells, cats in heat, and chattering teeth. It's late at night; melodies detonate inside my head; prongs are snug within the socket; the muse is She-Who-Must-Have-The-Last-Word. I crack my knuckles, take a breath. Let the neighbors beg me to shut my windows. Let them circulate petitions, file complaints. Let them leave at my doorstep, with anonymous notes, boxes of soundproof tile.

On the other hand, I wish I had an anechoic chamber, foam baffles padding the walls, in which to wile away the hours. I

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went inside one once at the Museum of Science and Industry, aware of a persistent hum I swore was coming from inside me. It was as if my restless, impressionable body had hoarded sounds since the day I was born, only to let loose with them in a room designed for absolute quiet. I felt phosphorescent with noise, like an amplified 4th of July sparkler, sitting alone and emanating, or so it seemed, the rustle of my first blanket, the surf at Santa Monica beach, the ignition of every car I've driven. I don't know how many minutes I waited for blessed silence before I began to hear the forte chords of my own anatomy: the river of blood that ran through my ears, valves and sacs wheezing like bellows, a haunted-house worth of creaking joints. "Help," I blurted, wanting out of my body as well as the room. But my voice was muffled by the spongy walls. It was like one of those nightmares in which you need to scream something in order to save your life, but not so much as a whimper comes out, your urgent words as dumb as rubber daggers.

After a mastoid operation, my mother took me to the doctor's office to have the bandage unwrapped. Dr. Holitzer worked solemnly, a concave mirror glinting on his forehead, his constant small talk meant to cheer a ten-year-old. Behind him hung a large chart showing a cross section of the human ear: the auditory canal, the hammer and anvil, the cochlea shaped like a seashell. "The improvement in your range of hearing," he said, "will take some getting used to." His voice boomed. His white coat crackled. The venetian blinds rattled like an avalanche of bones. He held a tuning fork up to my ear and I remembered a B-movie matinee: wincing Ulysses is strapped to the mast, the unbearably beautiful Siren song as piercing and shrill as a million kisses.

As a reward for my bravery, my mother walked me down Sixth Street to MacArthur Park, our footfalls loud and abrasive on the pavement. Paddleboats slapped the murky water. Pigeons grumbled under a shower of bread crumbs tossed by a grizzled indigent, as if motors chugged in their feathered chests. I was too old to hide beneath the dark wing of my

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mother's coat, but that's exactly what I wanted to do, incapable of conveying how rude and intrusive the city had become. Little man, my mother called me. But even her whispers were deafening, and I understood how kindness can hurt, can bruise the soft inner tissue.

It is thirty years later and my mother is dead, but her presence lingers like the peal of a bell. My father walks though the house they shared, feedback shrieking from his Miracle-Ear. Usually he pretends to hear me, nodding and smiling when I inquire how he is, an actor mugging in a silent movie. "Tuesday," he shouts when I ask him what he had for dinner. "Channel two," he barks when I ask him if he's cold. Often, he forgoes the theatrics of understanding altogether, looking at me blankly, his head askew, as if I were speaking in a foreign language, a language it's far too late for him to learn. He takes the hearing aid out at night. The instant my father's head hits the pillow, he's oblivious to the telephone, fire trucks, pistol shots. He forgets the fury and bravura of the world on the still, unreachable island of his bed.

Sometimes, at dawn, I burst through the seam between wakefulness and sleep like an acrobat through a paper hoop. There I am in my life again, eyes wide. I listen to birds fret in the trees, my bedroom walls ticking with warmth. The names of friends come back to me, things my parents said long ago, a tentative list of things to do, worries as stark and plaintive as prayers. Semiquavers, naturals, flats. Notes of a swelling crescendo.

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Sybil Pittman Estess

Esther Decides

She was only a woman, and no more
than his latest wife who was commanded
not to come before him without the grant

he gave away like candy to children. . . .
Although she was beautiful, she had an
inner life she had harrowed a long time.

Often she danced with her soul mates, or she
meditated. Sometimes she prayed. Sometimes
she went to see her shrink. She paid the bills

herself and knew her animus. (Haunted
by the ghost of her lost father, she thought
she slew it every year on his death day,

begged him not to bother her much more.)
But when her cousin called her to act for
her people, for Yahweh, and for herself,

she weighed it on the gauge, as Mary did
one distant day. Then Esther took spirit,
pumped her lungs with it, breathed seven breaths.

So she walked straight ahead, content to be
a Jew at risk, with good breasts. She wanted
no heaven. She faced him, female to male.

He looked. He decided. Both could live with
themselves a long time after what they said.
Esther alone had caused them to choose. . . . (Now

she tells her dead Dad all this as they talk.)

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Two Poems by David Baker

The Third Person

1

Not smoke but the shades of smoke, and not cloud-work
but the gray and smoke-green densities of clouds—
if he were sure their voices would carry through
the acre or more of underbrush and scrub

he'd call her name and stand still listening.
How can he be sure? He is tearing through the
needle locusts and grapevines, the heavy leaves
in decay over the crusted muds and mulch.

It's nearly dark, December, at four-thirty.
The woods are thick with distance, smoke-gray, growing
cold. He is trembling. We see his breath as slight
relief against the trees and smoke around him.

2

If his daughter simply wandered off to play
with something in the woods—flutter of a bird,
twist of color in the dim limb-light and chill—
what are we to do? We know what he can't see.

She's home now. But he's scared. We must bear the guilt
of standing by his wasted efforts watching.
There is a relationship among us all
which weather, love, nor longing will clarify—

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like the gray connection he can feel between
himself and the child he thinks he's lost, a kind
of cloudy grammar. What use if he could see us?
How can we intrude to point her pathway back?

3

You and I know this is wrong. You are inside
rocking your newborn daughter after dinner—
week after week like this, exhausted, lonely,
you want to speak one clear word to someone far.

You look out the window, as you have for hours,
for weeks now. The woods are darker still, growing
beautifully oblique—smoke and branch alike,
the white exhaust of winter dampness breathing.

The man is ripping through the brambles. He is
lost, tangled. He seems beside himself with grief.
Your mouth is open. But he won't hear a sound
in the smoke and gray-green distances of pain.

Home

Again the time has come to take our morning walk.
Look beneath the heavy cedars, little dear:
deer have strayed here overnight. Their hooves
have left some telltale moons and hearts in
innocent dry sands along our bending creek.
Creatures of many hungers say we're near.
Hear them call our human name? Like your mother,
her voice floating down the distant air
where we have come awhile, they sing us back
because they fear our straying out too far,
farther than the deep woods reach. Because we
went without her knowing we'd be gone, hear
her sweet voice cry above the others *come back in*.
In time we'll let it lead us home again.

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Two Poems by Howard Levy

To Aleksander Wat

You knew how things open,
a flower, a jail, an eye
and at the very last, a hand.

It is already evening when the hand
opens. The streetlights have come on,
people absorbed into their coats
and scarves hurry along the street.
No one speaks, not many even
look around them, they spare themselves
the torments of community.

In a small restaurant off the Central Square,
the first diners of the evening have entered.
A waiter who, only this morning, dreamed
of the exhaustion of his charity rises.
As he stands over them, you write
their hands poised to eat, his poised
to serve, the cook's to cook—

this intimate whisper of revelation:
this web of hands.

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Matisse in the Rotogravure: The Cutouts

He calls the scissors "neighbors,"
they have lived next to him for twenty years.
He laughs, I admire their garden and their children,
it amazes me how sharp steel
can make things grow.

Age, he says, is just another color,
one, frankly, he would prefer not to use.

Do you know my goal?, he asks.
Heraclitus, he says. I do not ever
want to step in the same light twice.

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Two Poems by Burton Raffel

Inventing Space and Time

No definition tells you rooms exist:
touch them too hard, too long, and like mimosa
they close against a stem so sightless green
that only darkness can help you bring them back—
those rooms stacked in your head, now, like children's
blocks, packed across the lines of memory
as if they'd grown there, deep in your brain, waiting
for your hands to find them, out in that other world.
Your eyes found them first, traced them, fixed them
with neuron nitrate on dendrite plates, set them
forever, in black and white, in color, etched them
skull-sharp, mind-hard, framed them like X rays of bone.
And then, in darkness, walking slowly from one
to another, you found an ancient connection, a corner
you knew, now changed, vividly new, visibly
old, different at night. Nothing defines
the difference, tells you a wall's been covered, shows you
lines that weren't there, shapes that formed
as you watched, as shadows tracked them and your eyes opened
and shut, surprised that no snapshot emerged, only
a room that wasn't there before, a picture
of space you hadn't walked in. You walk in it now,
exceedingly slowly, hoping the image you follow
will hold, wishing the dark was light, yet knowing
vision's a limited grace, and seeing with your hands
is safer. Let your fingers explore. There.
And there. And there. All over the silent room.

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Generation after Generation

Seen from above (real seeing always looks down:
do worms worry about God?), nothing grows up,
we spread from on high. No egg has ever made
a chicken until a chicken made an egg.
Like giant trees with tiny leaves: big
foals out little, as heifers drop their calves.
Cows may think life's grazing, enjoying a cud,
and bulls may think life's humping cows, but Nature
knows better. Birds and bees can't mix and match,
nor generations. Do penguins regret they're birds
that never fly? What crow imagines a heaven
lined with corn, instead of the field it flies in?
Do bulls sharpen their horns on a tree, waiting
for herdsmen, plotting a coup? All flowers on earth,
pulling together, can't budge an aphid. But flowers
don't try to move the world: the power of flowers
is hue, not cry. All of us crack our shells
as we enter the world, and flap away to Destiny.
Do birds forget? Nests and birds grow old,
dry up, wither, are gone forever, but birds
and nests go on, rolling through time like the wind
and rain that make them grow, that let them blow.
We chug and churn like clumsy gears, machined
for motion but clanking, slow, heavy with friction.
We grimace and grind until we're ground, till nothing
about us, in us, around us, moves. Time
moves, what's winding down winds and is down,
and every morning's sun shines on whatever's
there, it doesn't care on what or whom
or even why. Its life is shining. It shines.

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William Logan

Sunday in the South

The gravid gecko lies
aslant a stalk of banana,
just a tilde over
the *n* in *mañana*,

translucent as a thin
slice of kiwi fruit,
with two small beads—
or seeds!—for eyes. The root

of all evil is motion,
its body seems to say.
A crab spider looks it over
as it overlooks prey.

With a ticking, pebbly rattle,
tubercular pigeons sun
on the hot tin roof,
the roof of Sin,

burning, burning
over those fierce Christians
sinning—or singing, perhaps,
much louder than sinning.

The pigeons roost in judgment,
mottled, maculate angels,
complacent but nervous
above the stacked cannonballs.

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Heat is a form of love,
boasts the courthouse square
to the Frank Lloyd Wright
air conditioner.

Bats lodge in the rafters.
Against the low gas fire
of sunset, the bankrupt palms
open their broken armatures

like Edwardian ladies
at the season's last tea dance—
black fans, black fans!
And, at a distance,

thunder, a great steamroller,
rumbles now with a sad consent
over the tropics' grandeur
and diminishment.

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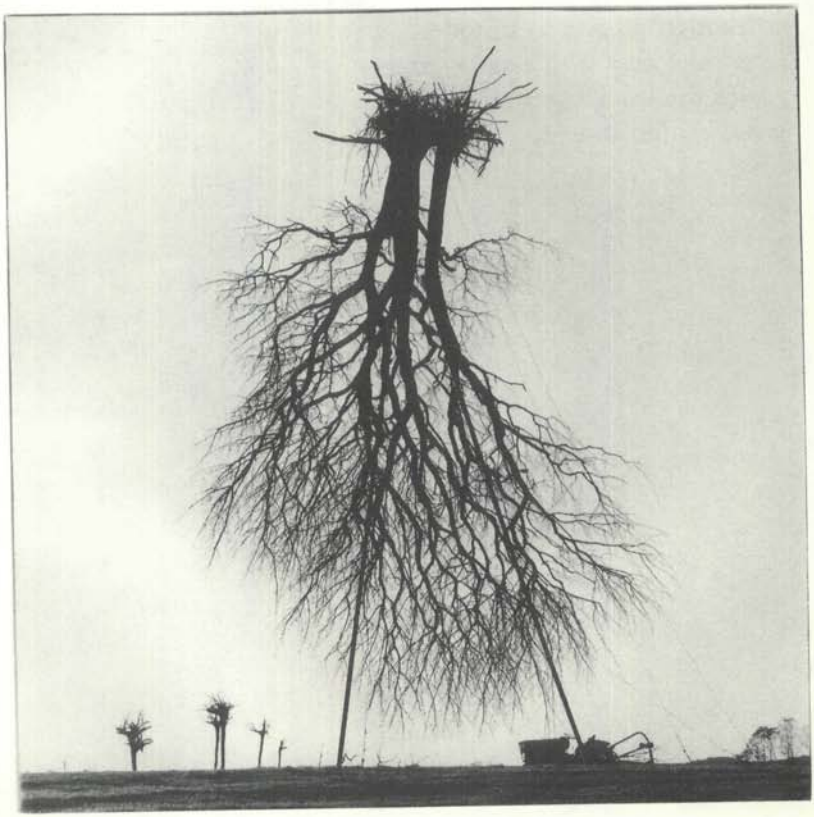
Trees

Walter Channing



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INTERVIEWER

Tell me about the genesis of these objects.

WALTER CHANNING

I've always been interested in trees. I don't know why, maybe it's an aberration in my genetic makeup. As a child, I lived in a wooded area in Massachusetts. I had a tree-surgery business as a kid. In the summers I took care of people's trees. Actually, when I had my Harvard interview, the Dean of Freshmen was F. Skinny Von Stade, and we talked about nothing but chain saws for the entire interview. It was late in the day. He'd been interviewing preppies all day long, who'd been telling him rather predictable things. When we started talking about trees it turned out he himself was about to buy a chain saw. All we talked about was McCulloch chain saws versus Homelites. I knew I had a good interview because he was really interested. So I got into Harvard because I knew a lot about chain saws. When I came to New York I was rather mortified that there were no chain saws and no trees. But near my office down on Rector Street they were tearing down a pier; all of this wood was being hauled out on barges and burned—long leaf yellow pine that was pulled up out of the seawater in perfect shape. So I set about collecting a bunch of it. I ended up with a basement on Thirty-seventh Street full of timbers. I bought a chain saw and got back into woodcarving.

INTERVIEWER

What did the neighbors think of that?

CHANNING

Not much! I could only run it for short bursts of time—then out in Easthampton I discovered a dump that only accepted trees—a tree collector's dream. It had vast numbers of stumps, the forgotten part of trees. No one ever does anything with a stump, yet a stump is a fascinating thing. So I got started carving trees in Easthampton. The very first piece I did was on a trunk as large as a telephone pole that had washed up on the shore at the end of Fowler Beach Lane. The tree was

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too large to move, so I sculpted it in place. I carved it into a giant golf pencil and carved in THE MAIDSTONE CLUB as if the pencil had just washed up on the shore. I invited Charles Addams to come and see this gigantic pencil, but before I could get him there, someone stole it. They must have had a forklift or something to carry it away. I think some fishermen must have got it, and it's probably standing somewhere to this day.

INTERVIEWER

Now what about these upside-down trees?

CHANNING

In 1977 I bought 130 acres off Scuttlehole Road, way north of the Montauk highway. I was very careful in clearing the property to uproot all the trees we had to move, and I saved all the roots, so they could be used for things. I collected an inventory of entire trees with roots and all the branches, and it was only a matter of a few minutes before I started thinking of hanging them upside down. It seems to me a very natural thing. I don't look at a tree as an object that necessarily has to be rightside up. I'm just fascinated by them.

INTERVIEWER

They are all oak?

CHANNING

Mostly oak. The big one is a cherry.

INTERVIEWER

Do people object? Your wife? Do farmers take a dim view of this?

CHANNING

My wife is very supportive, and most of my friends and neighbors love them too, but there is one neighbor who objects. Oddly enough, he's an artist, Jack Youngerman; he is appalled by them. I've known him forever. In fact I first got the property because he called me about it. He's always been

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quite supportive. He's a didactic guy who encourages younger artists. But he sees me as someone who lives more than one life, is not a struggling impoverished artist, and therefore is not, probably, a real artist. He really doesn't like these upside-down trees. He just seems to be offended by them. They offend his view. He wasn't very gracious about it. He told me what shit my sculptures were. But I think that any art that everyone likes is probably pretty dull.

INTERVIEWER

You can't sell these, can you?

CHANNING

No. But I have it in mind to try to cast a small tree, and then see what that's like.

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INTERVIEWER

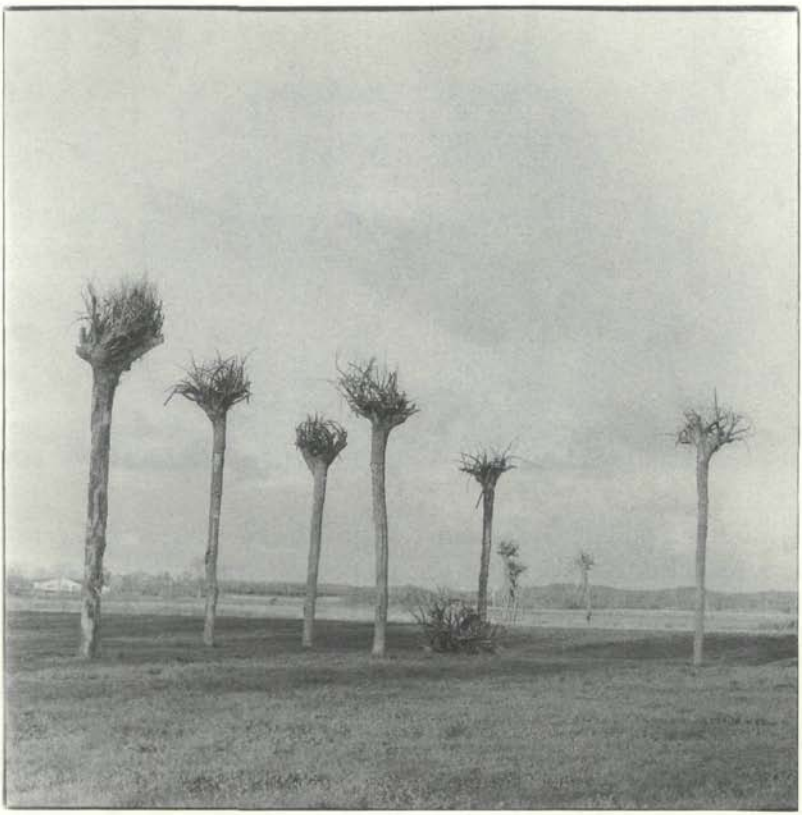
Cast it in bronze?

CHANNING

Yes. Upside down. So in your garden you might put an upside-down tree in bronze.

INTERVIEWER

Not the monster cherry; that would be rather expensive.



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CHANNING

That would have been very expensive. But I think I could do it if I could find the right tree. It isn't every tree you can turn upside down and get any effect out of. You have to find

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the right ratio of branches to height, and then the root system has got to have balance.

INTERVIEWER

What percentage of trees turn out to be suitable?

CHANNING

One in one hundred.

INTERVIEWER

So what do you do with the other ninety-nine?

CHANNING

I make pillars out of them, or pilasters. I save almost everything. I do a few mischievous sculptures; one is a big whistle. And when I started out I did the huge pencils—God, hundreds of them. Many, many pencils, and Ivan Karp sold a lot of them. I just wanted to try something else. And these were with the roots attached. A typical one was a tree with the roots standing on the ground turned into a great Eberhart-Faber #4.

INTERVIEWER

What are the dangers of using chain saws? Do you worry about that?

CHANNING

I've gotten pretty good at it. But I have a few scars. There are other tools that are equally tricky: band saws and chisels. You have to keep them incredibly sharp, particularly for hardwoods. I'm one of the few people who carves in hardwood, and hardwood requires extra-sharp tools, pneumatic tools and those kinds of things.

INTERVIEWER

Sculpting in wood is not as common as it is in other forms?

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CHANNING

It is not, though Henry Moore did a lot of things in wood. Historically, wood doesn't survive as well. It's surprising that even something preserved can actually — depending on what's in the wood — decay. It's also unpredictable, whereas stone and alabaster and marble are predictable and very linear. You don't discover odd things in them as you work. But a wood person has to be very non-linear. Ready for anything. A sculpture can change from one thing to another. I never scavenge a large piece of wood knowing what I'm going to do with it. After being with the big piece of wood for a while, the idea occurs. Driving into Sag Harbor after the big hurricane in August 1988, I passed a huge oak tree that had fallen by the tennis courts. The town took as much of the oak tree away as they could, but the chain saws they have in Sag Harbor are not long enough to cut a really big tree. So this trunk lay there by the tennis courts, and I drove past it many times; eventually it got to be too much for me. I hired Cliff Foster to come from Sagaponack with his biggest front-loader. He put it on the flatbed. This thing weighed six tons. A year later, I was looking at it, and I saw the most incredible vision: a lion getting a blow-job from a beautiful girl. It was exactly that. I could do it. What was particularly interesting was that the lion was going absolutely *berserk* — Beauty and the Beast, and what he was doing was going to cause him to die from the euphoria of it; he was in very bad shape. I made a maquette of it in clay. But at the time I was separated from my then-wife and had had a big fight with her. She was accusing me of everything under the sun. I was afraid that she would send some judge over, who would take one look at this huge piece and take my kids away. So, I created the next best thing, an octopus and a sphinx in consort. I'm very happy with the piece, but the first thing I saw, the thing I could've made, I didn't. I was afraid of my own imagination. But I still have the maquette. I've shown it, on occasion, to people. It's under burlap in the back of my closet, behind the hats. That lion was in the wood, you see; it was there.

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INTERVIEWER

You looked in the wood and saw it?

CHANNING

Yes. I had no plan. It's the same way that the tree appeared to me that first made me think of hanging trees upside down. It did not come to me *a priori* that it would be nice to put the tree upside down. It had to *become*. It's interesting to see the tree upside down. It doesn't grab everybody. Ivan Karp turned to me one day and said about a piece I'd brought in, "It doesn't have metaphysical twang." I was left scarred by that observation, but if I ever have to name that upside-down cherry tree, I'll call it "Metaphysical Twang."

—G.A.P.

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Chandelier

Andy Plattner

I was standing on the slick concrete floor of the barn hall, smoking a cigarette, waiting for Clement. It was four-thirty in the morning, and the dew on the roadside grass leading to the barn sparkled in the moonlight. Clement said he'd be here at five, but I hoped he would be here sooner and we could get this thing done. It was cool outside, and when the wind eased through the barn, it hardly felt like May.

The Queen of England was coming next week, and I was sorry it wasn't going to mean much. She was going to visit some of the horses she'd been boarding at Indigo Farm five miles from here. Then she was supposed to go to the races at Lexington Fields the following afternoon. Her itinerary had been listed in the newspaper. Horse farms failing all over Kentucky, and the Queen was coming. I'd lost mine and was about to move to Miami where I had a job selling speedboats.

I dropped the cigarette to the floor and touched the coal out with the toe of my boot. I walked down the brightly lit hall past a series of stalls on either side and opened the door to the tackroom. I turned on the light and just stood there for a minute trying to warm up. Back at the house this morning

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I was going to make coffee, had gotten out the tin of grounds, but then stood at the sink and cried.

In the tackroom now, I regretted that scene at the sink even more. It had simply come out of nowhere, and afterward I wiped my face with a tea towel and felt like a fool. And I hadn't made any coffee, either.

There was a small chocolate-colored refrigerator in the corner of the tackroom where Otis, my former stallion manager, used to keep candy bars and beer. The top of the refrigerator and the floor around it were cloaked in dust, the plug lying next to the outlet, its prongs bent. I went over to the refrigerator, pulled open the door. There were two cans of Coors on the top shelf. I took one, dry and warm, clicked open the top and took a drink. I set about getting a bucket of soapy water ready, finishing the beer as I found the things I needed on the shelf.

In the stall next to the tack room, Silver Patriot rustled his straw, sniffing the floor for stray oats. This was the first time I'd had the horse in the barn since I sold him, and he seemed tense. I'd bred Silver Patriot to seventy-nine mares that spring, about twice the normal amount. Five years ago, if a man had a decent stallion he could screen the mares, only selecting the top ones for mating. But this was when the yearling market was ablaze with foreign money and horses were more valuable than the land they grazed on. Then the yearling market collapsed, and the money all dried up. If a man owned a stallion, he compensated for the tough times by breeding it to anything with a mane and a tail.

Silver Patriot now belonged to a man named Francis Skiles, an Oklahoman who'd escaped the oil bust. Skiles bought Silver Patriot and the rest of my farm. He was moving in tomorrow, and I was leaving for Miami tonight. Skiles had been all right about giving me time to pack, sell off the furniture and all that. What I had left was a sand-colored Mercedes owned by a dummy corporation I'd set up when I'd seen trouble coming; my clothes, except for the serious winter stuff I'd dropped off to the Salvation Army; some trophies my horses had won. A

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few of the nicer pieces anyway. I had some money in a bank in Atlanta.

I had this job waiting for me in Miami. A friend of mine, Tim Willis, who used to have Havrewood Place over on Ferrick Pike, had moved to Florida last year and started a speedboat dealership with what he had left over. He said I could start anytime, that I was entirely qualified. Any man who could sell horses could sell anything.

Before Francis Skiles bought my place, he had me agree to stop breeding Silver Patriot for that season. He was indignant about it, actually. I said, fine, fine, he's your horse now, do what you think is best. Skiles liked to look me in the eye all the time, a cowboy thing I guessed, and I smiled at him and thought, wait till it gets tight for you, Oklahoma. You'll have the lights burning in the breeding shed twenty-four hours a day.

I'd used the Queen's visit as a selling tool. When Skiles first came to inspect my place, he'd looked over the high grass and falling fences disapprovingly. His eyes grew wide though, when I started telling him about the Queen. She'll be right over there, I said. And you'll be right here. You'll be able to tell your friends what the top of the world feels like.

The week before the deal was completed, Skiles sent over a vet to make sure Silver Patriot was in good condition. It turned out to be Doc Kirkland, who'd been out to my place a couple times before. He was young, mid-twenties, a big broad kid from Auburn, bald as an onion from a chemical he'd made himself and had tried out on a mangy parakeet.

The first time I met Kirkland was on Christmas day a year and a half ago. I usually used Doc Gillen, but he was vacationing in the Bahamas, so the vet clinic sent this kid over. Kirkland stitched up a yearling of mine that'd torn his legs all to hell while running through a fence. The kid talked the whole time he worked the stitching needle, telling me about his education, how he was the youngest vet ever to graduate Auburn. After he'd tied off the last stitch, he stood up straight, stretched his arms and smiled. "Man, the famous Kentucky

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horse business," he said. "I've always wanted to be part of this."

I thought he'd tired in the cold and doing all that stitching had muddled his mind, so I took him up to the house, and we sat in the kitchen and drank some whiskey, while my second wife, Donna, leaned against the stove and watched. Kirkland was all splattered with blood, and Donna seemed a little horrified, probably imagining him to be a time-warped member of the Gestapo. Donna was like that anyway, halfway disgusted with anything that had to do with the horse business. At one time, she'd been a Miss Harrisburg or Hand Creme Queen or something, and I'd sat next to her at the Derby a few years ago. We started there. When the banks started getting edgy about me, so did she. Donna was living in Ohio now and had remarried: a relief to my alimony.

The second time Doc Kirkland came to my farm was last summer. I was getting some two-year-olds cleaned up for a couple of retired surgeons from New Hampshire who were visiting the farm that afternoon. I'd brushed the three colts off, considered the asking price for each as I shined the name plates on their halters. When I checked over their papers, I discovered all three needed vaccinations. Doc Gillen was away on another call and since it was a routine deal, I just told the woman at the switchboard to send over anyone available.

It was Doc Kirkland. He pulled up in his new Blazer. He shook my hand. "Glad you asked for me," he said. "Glad my name's getting around."

We walked to the first stall. The colt in there began tensing up as soon as he saw us. Once we were in the stall with him, I took the chain end of my leather shank, ran it through one ring of the halter, under his upper lip and hooked the clip to the ring on the other side of the halter. I tightened down on the shank so the horse could feel the chain across its gums and the animal stood still.

When Kirkland raised the syringe needle, the horse struck at him. Kirkland reached for the shank, yanked it out of my hands and pulled down on it hard. "Son of a bitch!" he said,

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"How's that now!" The sound of the chain against the horse's teeth made me wince, though it was something I'd heard before.

Kirkland released the shank and the two-year-old stood there, its whole body trembling. The animal tried chewing the chain, blood dripping from its lips. I took a step towards the horse, holding my hands in front of me. I eased my grip around the shank and with my other hand, reached up and lifted its upper lip. Three big front teeth were missing, the sockets bloody and deep. I took the chain out of its mouth. "Get some peroxide," I said without looking at Kirkland. "And a tranquilizer."

After we'd cleaned the horse up reasonably well and Kirkland had put a few stitches in the torn gums, he and I stood outside the stall. Kirkland kept shaking his head. "Man, I'm sorry," he said. He kicked at the floor. "What am I gonna have to do to make this up?"

"I have buyers coming here today," I said. "What can you do?"

"I'll stay here and tell them what happened," he said. "I'll tell them you had a vet here with a bad temper." He blinked and spit on the floor. "Maybe we could make fake teeth out of plaster,," he said. "You can tell your buyers to come back next week."

"Forget it," I said. I thought I might be able to sell the horse anyway and was already running through my sales lines to see if any covered a horse missing its front teeth.

"Well, I know I owe you," he said, not looking up. "I mean I know how all this works. The business. We all do things for one another. I want to be part of that anyway."

"Never mind," I said. "Just get out of here. Sign the papers and leave me the shots. I'll take care of it."

When it was time for Francis Skiles to send over a vet, I waited down by the barn and up pulled Kirkland in his Blazer. He stepped out of it and smiled broadly. He was wearing a tan jumpsuit and his head shone in the afternoon sunlight. He walked over and clasped my hand. "They got a call from

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a guy this morning about a health check and when I heard it was your place, man, I volunteered right away."

"It's just a health check," I said. I headed for Silver Patriot's stall.

Kirkland followed. "I kept asking the office if you called in anymore," he said.

"I don't have any horses left," I said. I stopped in front of the stall.

"Look," Kirkland said, "This horse looks good to me, right? I mean if you don't want me looking him over too close, I won't."

"There's nothing wrong with this horse," I said.

Kirkland shook his head and glanced at the opening of the barn entrance. "I'll just wave my hand here, and you have your health certificate. Your horse will get sold, and I've done something for you."

"Look," I said.

Kirkland held his hand up. "You think I don't know how things work? Come on."

I pulled the stall door open too quickly, and it spooked Silver Patriot. He propped and went to the back of the stall. "You go in there and check every hair on this bastard," I said. "There's nothing wrong here. I don't want anything from you."

Kirkland stared at me, and I thought he might take a swing. But what would he think he owed me then? This was the kind of man who made the business bad anyway. You do what you have to do and say what you have to say and all of it evens out when we're six feet under. Damn fool kid.

Kirkland shrugged after a moment and stepped into the stall. He checked out the horse. Everything was fine. The next day I sold Silver Patriot to Skiles.

I had a friend, though. Clement Parks was his name, and his farm was in trouble, too. He and I had been sitting in a dinky bar in Midway two weeks ago, and he was in a dismal mood. He groaned when I told him about selling Silver Patriot.

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He said that was too bad; he wanted to breed a mare to him. Clement had high times when the market was good. We agreed it was a shame everyone was going out of business. Clement said his mare in foal to Silver Patriot would bring enough to let him keep his place going another year. "You know," he said, "if my place keeps going, in a way yours does, too." There was a pause, and then he and I laughed together. A good horseman, above all else, didn't get conned. That's what Clement was trying to do there. I knew selling speedboats wouldn't be the same, and I wanted someone to survive, even if it wasn't going to be me.

At one time, Clement's operation had been impressive. He owned three dozen mares, a couple stallions, and when things were going just right, he'd bought a French racehorse named Eclair and brought it to Kentucky. He sold shares, even ran an advertisement offering Eclair's breeding services in *The Wall Street Journal*. Clement got so carried away he had a chandelier installed at the center of the ceiling in his breeding barn.

It was a huge thing, that chandelier. He had me over the day it was hung. I stood right underneath as Clement switched the lights on and off.

"It looks like a spaceship," I said.

"Class," he said.

As Clement's farm vet put it, Eclair proved to be *sans desire*, or as he told Clement who didn't understand at first, unable. Clement tried giving the horse special vitamins and feed supplements, brought in fertility doctors from Humana in Louisville, and even called in an animal psychologist. The psychologist went in the stall with Eclair, put a hand on the horse's forehead, Eclair reared, struck at the psychologist and broke the man's arm at the elbow.

When Clement's farm started to go, it was like mine and went fast. The yearling market had gone sour, and he borrowed against his land to pay the bills, and then the value of land collapsed because somebody finally figured out raising thoroughbreds was a fairly risky enterprise. A few of the lucky ones had seen it coming and bailed out, but most were like me, facing bankruptcy and holding on by our wits alone.

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Around five A.M., the whining suspension of a horse trailer in the distance made Silver Patriot jog to the door of his stall. I'd finished preparing the bucket of soapy water and stepped out into the hall. I walked over to his stall door. The horse had its muzzle pressed against the screen on the top part of the door. I looked under him. His speckled penis came rolling out of the sheath. Clockwork, I thought. He snorted, the gray coat covering his spine dull in the shadowy light of the stall.

I walked outside. There was another barn I used for breeding, the floor there covered with soft wood shavings, the walls padded. This morning we were going to have to do it down here, out of the way. Park a trailer in front of the breeding barn, turn the lights on, hell, I might as well take an ad out in the paper.

If Skiles found out about this, there'd be a couple things that might happen. He could sue me for breach of contract or try to have me put in jail. One thing for sure is that our deal would be off. The Queen would've come and gone, and I'd still be stuck with this farm.

These were anxious times. A man I knew at Readacres in Tompkinsville was in lock-up for three months after he'd stolen a lawn jockey from the front entrance of his farm after he'd sold the place to land developers. There were a million worse things I could be doing other than letting Clement breed his mare to Silver Patriot, but if we got caught somehow it would've been the worst thing that could happen for me. I didn't want to be the last horseman left in Kentucky. What do you think that poor son of a bitch would be resorting to?

I stood in front of the barn as the truck's headlights glanced down the road towards me. It was still dark outside, the sky deep ocean blue. When the truck pulling the trailer was fifty yards away, I waved for it to pull around the back of the barn. The truck turned off the road, angled for the side of the barn, the trailer dipping as it went over low spots in the grass. The truck drove alongside the barn, and I walked after it.

When Clement had the truck and trailer behind the barn entirely, he switched off the engine. Silently, he stepped out

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of the truck and, like a shadow—it was that dark—jogged to the rear of the trailer and threw open the iron arm which helped hold the back ramp in place. He jumped on the wheel cover on the side of the trailer. He was a short man, late thirties, and was wearing jeans, a light-colored T-shirt and a ball cap. He reached up and tried unhooking the top latch, now the only thing holding the ramp up. When Clement had bought this trailer a few years ago it had the newest, greatest thing: a hydraulic system that allowed for the ramp to be lowered and raised quietly and carefully without startling the horses inside. But something had gone wrong a few months after he bought it, and when Clement called the company to complain, he discovered they were out of business.

Now, he gave the ramp a push, and it swooped to the ground and landed with a muffled thud in the soft grass. Clement jumped down from the wheel cover. He walked over to me, shook my hand, "Do you miss it yet?" he said.

"I'll be in sunny Florida while you're standing here in a goddamn food line," I said, laughing.

"Right," he smiled.

We unloaded Clement's mare, and he clipped the end of a rope shank to her halter and led her around to the front of the barn. Once we stepped into the barn hall, the mare's hooves clattered on the concrete and Silver Patriot grunted from his stall. The mare swatted her head from side to side, and Clement tried patting her neck. She was a small bay, kind of dumpy looking really, and once, a foal of hers had sold for $300,000. I guessed Clement hadn't time to clean her up because her mane was chunked by dried dirt, her back dusty.

I could see Clement more clearly in the barn hall light. His eyes seemed energized, his face deeply lined and listless. I reached in my pocket, took out the breeding certificate and held it to him. "Before I forget," I said.

Clement took the paper, stuffed it in his pocket. "When I get my things in order," he said, "I'll send you payment of the stud fee."

"Right, okay," I said. I walked to a stall across the hall from

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Silver Patriot's. "Let's put her in there," I said, pushing the door open. Clement led his mare in there, and I went across the hall to the tackroom. I lifted the bucket of water, sponge floating on top and picked a roll of Vetrap off the shelf.

Clement held the mare while I tied her tail from the top halfway down with Vetrap. Then I washed her out. "So if I need to make my getaway by sea, you're the man to call?" Clement said.

"Speedboats," I said, "Now there's something a man can look forward to selling." I smiled at him. "'Yes sir, this model *does* come in yellow.'"

After we finished with the mare, Clement and I left her in the stall, and we walked across the hall to Silver Patriot's stall. I went to the tack room to get a leather shank and a twitch, a long wooden cane with a rope loop at one end, something I always had to use on Silver Patriot because around breeding time he'd about lose his mind and would rear and strike at anything.

Clement had Silver Patriot's stall door opened halfway and was holding the horse by the halter. The animal's eyes were burning brilliantly. I handed Clement the shank, and he hooked the clip at the end of it to the horse's halter. I put my hand through the loop at the head of the twitch and reached for Silver Patriot's muzzle. I pulled the heavy skin towards me, tilted my wrist up and let the rope fall across the tips of my fingers. I nodded to Clement, and he took the twitch near the bottom and began turning it. The rope tightened around the horse's muzzle, and that sensation froze him. I'd seen horses try getting out of a twitch but Silver Patriot always stood like a soldier when I had it on him.

"We going to do this down here?" Clement said, quietly, as I was washing the horse off.

"Yeah," I said. "It'll be fine." I stood up and Clement looked concerned. "Our luck can't be that bad," I said, and he nodded and grinned. He untwisted the twitch, removed the shank-clip from the horse's halter. Silver Patriot went to the back of the stall, then came forward snorting after we stepped out.

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"We'll just do it in the hall," I said, "Right here in the hall. If my stud has trouble finding the mare, I'll drop the shank and help him."

"It's not like he's going to run away from it, huh?" Clement said. He went to get his mare. He led her out with the rope shank he'd brought, and they waited for me in the middle of the hall. I stepped next to Clement and put the twitch on the mare. I went back over to Silver Patriot's stall and hooked the leather shank back on him. I couldn't use any twitch on him then; he was the one who needed to do the moving.

I brought Silver Patriot out of the stall, and he went straight for the end of Clement's mare. The stud sniffed at her, his sides pulsing with swift breath, hooves splattering nervously on the floor. I stood at the end of the shank, letting him do what he wanted. The mare raised a back hoof, and Clement tightened the twitch down, and she lowered it again.

Silver Patriot heaved himself on her. His penis was firm and erect and entered her easily. I was relieved there. Sometimes a stallion could get crazy if he couldn't find his mare. Normally you had a man there for just that reason, to take hold of the stallion's penis and help it with entry.

Silver Patriot thrust at the mare several times, and I wondered what would happen if somebody drove onto my farm, lost or needing to use the phone and saw this light in this barn and found Clement and I here doing what we were doing. What would they think? Two bankrupt horsemen breeding a mare and stallion in the dead of night. We'd tell the stranger a terrific lie. I smiled thinking of the possibilities.

And I thought about Francis Skiles finding out and the color of this face and him threatening to do everything about it I could imagine. The kind of man who'd make nothing but trouble for me.

Clement was watching the mating intently, and I thought of that damn chandelier in his breeding shed. It was gone now, the bank had seen to that. But it had been a fabulous thing, something you'd be unlikely to forget. How could you not want to help a man who'd done something like that?

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Silver Patriot rested now atop Clement's mare. He gnawed at her mane, his weight seemingly heavy on her back. Clement nodded to me, and I pulled the shank to get the stud's attention. Silver Patriot didn't respond, and I yanked on the shank again. The horse tried half-heartedly to dismount. "Come on, now," I said, yanking at him again. His hooves had slid forward during the mating, and I realized he was trying to balance himself on the mare.

I was ready to tell Clement to move the mare up a step when Silver Patriot tried dismounting again. His hooves slipped. The horse landed on his rump right at the mare's back feet, and there was a moment when the animal was sitting up like a dog. He fell straight backward then, the tops of his shoulders and the back of his head hitting the floor. There was a quick cracking noise, something in the bones giving way. The mare kicked at the commotion, and Clement swiftly pulled her away.

Silver Patriot rolled to his side and was motionless. He breathed fiercely, his eyes blaring, wide open. The barn hall was very quiet then. Clement stuck the mare in one of the stalls and came over to where the horse was lying. "Something snapped," he said. Clement took off his hat and ran a hand over his thin hair.

"His back, I think," I said.

"Jesus," Clement said. Outside it was beginning to grow light. Thirty minutes and it would be daybreak. The horse's rib cage rose and dropped. One of his eyes seemed to be staring up at the ceiling, an eye bright and shining like a huge, wonderful marble. I hoped the stud wouldn't get phobic and start struggling against what was wrong. That would be horrible because Clement and I wouldn't be able to do anything but watch.

Silver Patriot couldn't move. Clement grabbed me by the wrist. "What are you going to say?" he said. "What are you going to tell everyone?"

I shook my head and felt my lips tighten.

"He's insured right?" Clement said. "You said that skinhead vet had been here."

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"Yep," I said. I turned and walked a short way down the hall. I wanted to get in my car and drive to Florida and sit in a lounge chair for a month dreaming up alibis.

"Is Doc Gillen in town?" Clement said. I nodded without turning to look at him. "You know how that old bastard is. He'll ask questions."

I didn't know about that. Maybe if Doc Gillen got here, he could work with us a little. I turned and started back for the horse. Its penis was still erect, the tip touching the bottom of its stomach. I'd heard of something like that, men who were paralyzed in wars still getting hard-ons, but this signaled something worse to me now: loss of control.

Clement was gone. I heard something from the tackroom, and I couldn't think of what he might be doing. Something fell to the floor, and Clement swore. I hoped his mind was working all right. At some point he'd have to get his mare and trailer out of here.

He appeared from the tackroom carrying a bright orange safety extension cord. It was a long, thick cord we used for X-raying horses in their stalls. There was only one outlet in the barn, and it was in the tackroom. The cord's insulation and thick rubber exterior protected open wires and sparks from touching the straw on the stall floors.

He walked over to me, trying to sort tangles. "I have a plan," he said, without looking up. "I'm gonna pull my truck around and we're going to drag this horse out to his paddock."

"With this cord," I said, taking a bit of it in my hand. "It'll snap like a goddamn rubber band."

"We'll double it up and double that up if we have to," he said. "It'll hold." He handed the cord to me. "I got a chain in the truck," he said. "We'll get this done." I paused a second, then took the cord. "I thought about tying some of your shanks together," he said, "But you need to soak leather to get it to hold right."

"Damn, Clement," I said.

He kicked the cord away from his feet. "You take care of this," he said. "I'll bring the truck around." He turned and

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suddenly ran past Silver Patriot, threw open the hall door and disappeared.

I worked on untangling the cord. When Clement's engine started up, I pictured him just driving off and leaving me to do all the explaining. Then I heard his truck stop along the side of the barn. He was unhitching his trailer, was going to do what he said. He'd never just leave his mare, of course, I knew that. He needed this stud to be out of the barn, his mare out of here, so he could get back to trying to save his farm. He'd back up my story, and I'd back up his, whatever it turned out to be.

We did what Clement suggested. The horse's back was to the entrance of the barn, and Clement reversed his truck in and brought out a chain as thick as a man's wrist with big hooks at either end. Clement pushed one hook under the horse's foreleg, then stepped over, reached under the animal and pulled the hook through, the chain following it. I did the same with the cord, having doubled it twice and shoved the two loop ends under the animal's lowest rib cage bone. I stepped over the horse and pulled the loops through. I hooked the loops to the bumper of Clement's truck, then went to get the other ends to tie them off. Clement did the same with the chain.

After we finished getting the horse tied behind the bumper, Clement went to get in his truck. Silver Patriot had attempted raising his head twice to see what was going on, but could only get it a few inches off the floor before the strain got to him.

Before Clement pulled the driver's door shut, he yelled, "You follow! Anything happens give a holler." He closed the door and started the engine. I stepped to a spot a yard from my horse's belly.

Clement eased the truck forward. The chain and cord tightened, and the horse was pulled forward a few inches. The animal's hooves raised from the floor, and I thought it was going to roll over. "Keep going!" I said. He gave the truck more gas and headed for the hall entrance. The cord and chain

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held, and the horse didn't roll over, though its feet were angled upward crazily like an animal still falling.

Once Clement was on the hard dirt road in front of the barn, he aimed for the closest paddock, about forty yards away. He was going steady now, ten miles an hour, a good clip if you're pulling a thousand-pound animal behind you. Clement got off the dirt road and drove over the high, wet grass of the field. Silver Patriot's head remained lazily to one side and didn't seem responsive to anything. I hoped the horse wasn't alive anymore.

The gate to the field was open, and Clement drove through and out about sixty yards, the tips of the grass touching the underside of his truck. Clement stopped the truck and left the engine running. He jumped out, and he and I unhooked the horse. After Clement had thrown the chain and cord in the bed of the truck, he nodded to the path he'd made, the grass bent to the ground by the weight of the horse being pulled across it. The worst things though were those tire tracks. It looked exactly like what it was: a paralyzed animal had been drug to the center of a field.

Clement put his hands on his hips, surveying the path. "What are you going to tell them?" he said.

"I'll think of something," I said.

"I don't know about this," he said. "Maybe I've had better ideas."

"It'll be all right," I said. "You better go now. Make sure you back out over the tracks." The horizon had broken by this time and nightfall had almost disappeared.

Clement shook my hand. I thought he wanted to say something to me, good luck probably, but I guess he didn't want to sound scared. "I already forgot your name," I said, and he nodded. He walked over and got back in his truck, carefully backed around the horse, then straight out over the tracks. He pulled around the side of the barn, hooked up his trailer, went in the barn to get his mare, and then he was gone.

I looked at the path and thought, this is only one set of tracks, it shouldn't be that hard to cover it up. I stood there

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for a minute thinking about my options. After a minute, I headed up for the house to call the vet clinic. Then I'd have to call Skiles, and he'd have to get his insurance man over here. It wouldn't take long for that: insurance men were already jumpy and suspicious about every horse claim anyway. They'd want to get here quickly, judge for themselves if an animal could be saved.

I wondered how truly damaged Silver Patriot was, if anything could be done for him. Maybe Doc Gillen knew some trick to fix him up. Doc Gillen had been around forever. I thought of him looking over those tire tracks and eyeballing me and demanding some answers. When I was almost up to my house, I decided whatever was wrong with Silver Patriot could not be fixed.

I waited by the paddock where my horse was lying. I didn't turn when I heard the car coming up. After the engine died and the door opened, there was Doc Kirkland's voice. I'd been standing there watching the sunrise, Silver Patriot's rib cage rising and falling in the high grass, lost in my own thoughts.

Kirkland walked over to me. He was wearing a light blue jumpsuit, and his head seemed dull, like it had been powdered. "They said you called for me!" he said while still a few feet away. He looked out to where I was looking now. "Wow!" he said, "What happened?"

"I came down to feed this morning and found him like that," I said.

"Looks like somebody ran over him," he said.

I faced Kirkland. "I came out," I said, "Down here to feed. The horse was in the paddock. I think he must've slipped in the grass or something."

"Looks like he got hit by a car," Kirkland said, again.

I stepped closer. "You're the man here, Doc," I said. "A man's farm is riding on this."

He pushed up his lower lip and nodded. "But you're leaving, right?"

"I'm not talking about me now," I said. "I mean Skiles,

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the guy who's buying this place. If he doesn't collect his insurance on this horse, he won't put any more horses on this farm." He stared blankly at me. "Jesus, he'll probably subdivide it. We've got to keep together here now, you and I."

"You're leaving," he said, "You can say what you want."

"All I'm saying is that you and I have to be on the same page here," I said, nodding. "That's all."

"What am I supposed to say?" he said.

I slapped him on the shoulder. "All you say is that you came here, saw the horse like he is now and drive your Blazer out in the field, right over that path there."

"Why would I do that?" he said.

"You know," I said, "You didn't know what to take out to the horse, it's a bad injury and all. So, you took the whole truck out there." Doc frowned. "It's entirely believable," I said. He was quiet.

"Look," I said, "Skiles will get his insurance money and he'll see everyone here plays straight and he'll want to invest more. He's an oilman for Chrissake! He'll buy horses and have them all over this farm. He's the kind of man we need!" I slapped him on the arm now. "You both are!"

Doc winced. "Maybe nobody will believe my story,"

"As soon as you drive out there, your story is the truth," I said.

Doc looked out to the horse. "What do I do again?" he said.

"You drive over that path there," I said. "Pull around to the other side of the horse, right over the tracks." He listened while looking at the ground. "You drive over that path and this farm will be full of horses again. Not a bad trade, right? But we need to go on and do it. The others will be here any minute."

He tilted his head and shaded his eyes with a big hand. The sun was rising, and I was already thinking about Florida. "So what happens to you?" he said.

"Hell, I'll be around," I said. He stared at me and nodded. "I might start another place up myself."

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"All right," he said.

"Better get in your truck now," I said. He did that. He had a cordless phone in there like most vets. I'd call Skiles again to make sure his insurance man was on the way. I'd do it out in the center of the field with my horse breathing hard at my feet.

I decided to stay in Kentucky until the Queen came, so, in one way, I had meant what I'd said to Kirkland about hanging around. In selling, you do at some point have to say something that is the truth, though all you have to do there is understand your buyer's beliefs and appeal to them. That is the trick, that will always be the trick.

I stayed in a motel outside Lexington called the Kent, about fifteen miles north of the racetrack. I took a room around the back, kept the car parked there. I brought all the trophies from the trunk of the car into my room and set them in various places: a silver plate atop the television where I kept my liquor bottles; a half-dozen julep cups over on the bathroom sink; two gold bowls I cracked peanut shells into one night while watching a ballgame, Reds vs. Pirates.

The Queen came to the racetrack on a Saturday and like everyone else who wanted to see her, I had to wait in line to buy a ticket. That was a cold Saturday, unusual for Kentucky in mid-May. I had nothing tweed, wool, or corduroy left, so I put on four pairs of socks and underwear. A couple T-shirts, one button-down and a khaki coat added to that still weren't enough, but I figured after this day was over, it would be.

I paid my bill at the motel that Saturday morning, packed my bags and left the trophies in the room. I gauged how far south I'd be able to drive after the races before having to pull over for the night. Northern Georgia, I guessed.

I left the motel for the track, sat in traffic awhile, and got to the track right before the second race. The grandstand was packed inside because of the Queen and the cold. The newspaper had said she would be coming to the saddling ring before one race, though it didn't say which one. It hadn't been the first. I asked the first three people I saw.

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After the fifth had been run, even the stalwarts who had hoped to see the Queen up close retreated to the glassed-in sections of the grandstand. I thought she wasn't coming at all then, though I stayed outside drinking bourbons.

Finally, right before the eighth, after the horses left the saddling area for the track, six men surrounding one woman in a powder-blue dress and pillbox hat came quickly across the grounds, right in front of everyone pressed up against the huge grandstand windows. People standing ten deep leaned closer, craned their necks, their breath heavy on the cold glass. The windows fogged. For a second, the Queen stopped and stuck a short arm in the air and smiled at them, those who were inching closer as they were fading away.

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S.X. Rosenstock

Le Réalisme Fantastique de Berthe Bovary Lipschitz en Anglais Americain

What can I say? I know the textile trade,
Its crafts, its business, inside and out.
Each side of the Atlantic is the same;
The goods are compromised; the compromise
Is good for business, and this is good
For one short run of what's past beautiful:
Her fringe, his faille, your piece-good peonies.
The purchase of the short run is what's style.

I am that thing's insupportable child.
Do you remember me? The Bovary,
The one, who has survived adultery
As art? The babe? The faint-producing girl?
The one farmed out to nurse in that poor house
With Fame, a perfume ad, hung on shoe nails?
A complicated, simple entity,
A mad cap clutched tight by *Charbovari*.

The gossips ask so much: *Why didn't she*
Transform his love, his masculinity,
Into the thing she craved? It would have been
Like pulling teeth, but still she should have pushed.
If men weren't hard, who would be interested?
I pushed my father once and he was dead,
A mass beneath the arbor and its shade;
The constancy I knew before the mills.

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I landed at my grandmother's; she died.
An aunt, all kinds of poor, then took me in.
I worked at cotton mills for years for change.
The glyphs on my grown hands match my scarred cheek;
My mother'd elbowed me one afternoon
Right past a chest, into a curtain hook.
I have a well-healed gash. One rain-stained day
I walked it, musing, past a nearby farm:

One sow, couch-vast, lay suckling in her mess
Her many little infants, then a man—
I should have seen him shadow me?—began
A litany of wild remarks. He'd hide
Behind the barn, a tree, the pigs. He'd scream
My name with expletives, his mouth the maw
Of my worst fears: *You* are *your mother's girl!*
The sow stirred in her sleep; one nurseling died.

The man—a tramp—picked up the fresh-dead pig.
Its mouth was open, white milk dribbled out.
I stood too still. *My tit, my pretty tit,*
He cried, then opened up his shirt and feigned
It was a breast, the corpse. He preened. I froze.
He grabbed its haunches with both hands and thrust
The thing between his legs, jerked up its snout.
You can't come to the mother save through me.

He ran at me. The rain had made an ocean
In heaped manure, and I fell in to garner
Detritus as tiara; slops as earrings;
One mud-glove pair; one waterbeetle necklace;
One sin-diluvial chemise, all whetted
To revelations: belly, bush and nipples;
One divot boot; one mule of pondscum, worm-trimmed;
And last, the pork corsage he piled on, fleeing.

The saturation taught my sex its sex;
A gaggle warped this wisdom with goose noise.

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I thought of sitting up, of dry, dry hair.
I mused a crematorium's hot air,
A rising song, inventing heat, its lift . . .
I scaled—though I was lying, yes—my mold.
I nearly was out of my mind: a voice:
Are you fallen? Or have you met foul play?

A man; a gloveless hand; a horse; a ride
Across the sun-abandoned countryside
In man-warm clothes; our hat; our flask
Of torrid brandy's porous heat; our task
Of conversation left to road with hoof,
Until, *Live here, beneath my father's roof.*
My mother's dead, but you may have her shoes,
If you'll accept our aid;—our door:—*we're Jews.*

They don't speak proper French, Alsatian Jews.
They're German-like, Maurice, Michel and Paul.
(New names.) They've started a new factory.
They brought three hundred people from Alsace.
They left their clothworks there for full-fledged France.
They love the France that thinks them Prussian spies.
They've clothed, employed and educated me;
And once the warm Michel discussed his God:

We don't know what It is, but we're Its Jews.
It's clear, in time, It wants; It's needed us,
Our held-up history, our gravity,
For Its sole moon, for the fidelity
Of matter to its tether. Marry me.
I want you faithless, Catholic or Jew.
But why? *The sight of you soaked through was sex like It.*
Forgive the likeness, God, mine to a Jew!

The next day at the factory I saw
The man, Maurice, my father-, soon,-in-law,
Caress and strike his younger son, Michel.
He kicked his precious offspring in the crotch.
Two women brought eight women to the men:
Potential brides, Jewish, much-parented,
Quite unlike me. A rabbi touched my cheek;
And swans kept swimming on their polished stuffs.

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I wouldn't choose this thing if I could choose,
My father figure said to me that night.
It is like choosing to be God himself.
We famine friendship with the world at large.
We drought their hopes of insufficiency,
The mass gentility, *surviving them*
All, *insufficiently*. (We Sinai fetes
However irreligious we become.)

At dawn I wrote a poem in my room.
I call it *Ruth*. I wrote it for the truth,
The lost Naomi I will trail to death
In handmade shoes, though I'm departed now
With men on board a ship bound for New York.
—We could improve on Lipschitz, couldn't we?
—I'm looking into Lincoln presently.
And now it is my wedding night below:

I'm so afraid, Michel. "Of love?" Of death
By love. What is the Jewish afterlife?
It's stones on top of tombstones, *yours and mine*, . . .
Stones? . . . *left there by the children we create.*
Just kiss me now, *and sleep here by my side.*
Perhaps my child would bring a figurine
Of jade, pink jade . . . *I think not*, *dear*. Perhaps
A line of verse etched on the tomb? *Good night.*
Perhaps a line I write myself? Michel?

You want to know what I will make of love.
You thrill to learn that I am beautiful,
And scared. *You*'d kill to know if I am good:
If I will meet a man in rented rooms;
If I will make my corset's lacing hiss,
A snake in genesis, undoing it;
Will I take arsenic as payment due
My sex's interest? What do I dream?

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I dream my mother loves me for myself.
I dream, in fact, I am myself her dream.
She's holding me. There are no bodices,
No suicidal promises of loves
Like fairy tales. Her hands on me, my fat,
My soul-implying, thighs, are hands, not alms
To give poor noblemen in nightmare dreams.
She touches me. We dream ungrasping touch.

I cry new tears onto her cuticles.
Her pretty and unbeautiful dry hands
Create a manger for my bowed black head
Because I manger them in my own grip.
I cradle cradling: Each fingertip,
A baby, will be nursed—I'll nurse—to health
With each wept kiss; and if I can, I'll sing
That if there's sweet romance, we are that thing.

But I awake to see America.
I re-receive a vision smart in black:
A sex whose sole redress is sex, whose whole
Unmastered book of days is charity,
When it is not the most pathetic cant,
Volition as the courage to attract
And to be acted on.
Volition-verse,
I'll dream my mother's kiss, and wake to you.

I'll take my stirring husband in my arms—
I'll be quite Jewish doing it—and love
The way I write: I'll love the way I write.
Dear Father faith, Dear Mother dream, Dear Child,
Dear Mate who's sensible, and warm, and hot,
Dear Nation whose vast compass is your plot,
(You province of new bourgeois demi-gods!)
I'll be some kind of realist, and write.

for my Alison Blythe

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Two Poems by James Laughlin

The Wood Nymph

Sometimes when I am working
In the forest clearing brush from
The hemlocks, a wood nymph approaches
Walking her two small dogs.
Soft-footed and undulant she glides
Through the trees, a figure of grace,
A nymph of surpassing beauty.
Sometimes in her passage she'll stop
To greet me. Xaire, she says, xaire
Broté; greetings to you, mortal man.
Clear-voiced, she speaks as if
She were singing. She tells of
The spirits that inhabit the marshes.
She is the guardian of those who
Live in bogs and wetlands.
She knows their natures and their
Histories. Formosa et docta est,
Fair of form and learned:
She never identifies herself
But I think she may be Melissa
of Kalymnos, the child of Athena
By a mortal named Euclidon; she
Was renowned for her singing.

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Penelope venit abit Helene

after Martial, Ep. 1.62

It was raining during her lunch
hour and to keep dry she went
into one of those shabby little
theaters near Times Square.
In the next seat was a well-
dressed benevolent looking
gentleman perhaps in his sixties.
Because he resembled her father
back in DesMoines she did not
feel frightened when he took
her hand and drew it to his
waist. Such a nice old man.

NOTE: Update of a famous poem by Martial. A noble Roman lady goes to the baths at Baiae, which were notorious for loose morals. She enters the place as virtuous as Penelope, the wife of Ulysses, but leaves it a slut like Helen of Troy.

—J.L.

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Three Poems by Henry Sloss

Slice of Art

A goateed sage
chews salvia against toothache
salivates as the new kitchen maid frosts a cake

Hoary with age
his is a classic clairvoyance
unlistened to or heard with undisguised annoyance

Fingering a page
of his adherents' defection
he chafes at the loss of an old-fashioned erection

Listless the mage
devotes himself to denials
of such folly as would find in her motions wiles

When an image
he might have known was his niece
winks by way of offering him a forbidden piece

But the hajji
bows his head and joins his palms
as though obeisance were the object of her alms

Scared sacred scarred
the aging and unread bard
thrills to the world's abuse becoming badinage

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Fairy Tales

Seeing the courted, won, become
So like the frog one kissed,
A lesson seems to beckon *psst* . . .

The wretchedness of rag and besom,
Though sisters run it down,
Hurts less than watching Prince turn clown.

Dispell the charmer in your bosom
Before he reappears
Beside you, smiling through your tears.

Take a beldam's advice and buy some
Property on a beach
Desire's bedlam cannot reach.

Give up the yearning to be some
One other than you are;
Surgery leaves a scar.

She took my hand then, moved by some
Impulse or another,
And croaked, *Come*, *darling*, *kiss godmother.*

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Irregular Exercise

Since it is Sunday and there is still time,
I think, instead of walking in the woods
Looking for mushrooms, I will try to be
The good neighbor I look out for in others:
Why not carry a trashbag through the poison
Ivy and pick up after idiots.

I should say inadvertent idiots
I think, because at least half of the time,
And twice on Sundays, I see through the woods
Of malice to a meadow, in which others
And even one's sour self can seem to be
Innocent of the malice that is poison.

Some of the mushrooms I have found are poison;
Nature itself won't suffer idiots
To feed on it, and there may come a time
When litter's negligence will seem to be
A self-destructive mechanism others
Imagined must be man's, but was the woods'.

The road I walk along winds through the woods
And I feel good, while joggers sweat the poison
From their pores; better when church-going others
Drive past *(I wonder what that idiot's*
Doing) and see my good deed; proud to be
A part of the Solution to my Time.

When "good" turns into "proud" I know the time
has come, as come it must for idiots
Like me who hope their picking up the woods
Will pick them up, will palliate the poison
Swallowed by children with the praise of others,
The time has come to stop and let things be.

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The more I clean, the more there seems to be
To clean, and my despair at so much time
Wasted becomes contempt for idiots
Who crucify creation with their poison;
Styrofoam is too sturdy for the woods,
Self-doubt too sure the enemy is others.

The poet seeking honey in blown thyme
Remains a lethal person, just like Them,
Whose Shoulds get lost track of in wandering Woulds.

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María Negroni

from Islandia

I

No one said the spasm of battle would last forever. Nor asked: Is there a violence sadder than the word island? Said: you have found a ruse and will reinvent it forever. Swords will continue to erupt from sheaths, the crest will lodge the fiery moon and from now on a tangled mass of sails will signify exalted impatience, not the traditional annoyance of fear. But one avarice will be fruitless: nostalgia. So it was said. The men did not know how to answer. With the tip of the tongue they retrieved a tear, salt as the sea.

II

As if a single voice pierced every one of them, their hidden sides, sordid, their imprudence in remaining utterly ignorant of happiness, of postponing it, thus they live. They know the modesty of saying I, but prefer the amplitude of this night or the supposed song of the only nightingale they have ever heard or will hear, which does not differ from silence. They know, too, the exact measure of some riddles that they will not be able to solve: why certain parts of the body are like countries and others like prison cells, why courage and naiveté form a constellation. In that discretion which is also a form of order (but less innocent) there is a flirtation with the implicit, the remote hope that, seen from afar, their gestures will be rounded into completion (meaning). In one gulp, they have swigged down summer. Suddenly, they seem tired. Something tells them rain is coming.

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III

Do they divine that there is a link between violence and banality? Would they like to unveil it yet are ignorant? Wouldn't they know how to perceive the odor of sweat, semen, saliva, breath, the attraction exerted by certain reflecting helmets that return to glow in dreams? Who knows. They are awed by the body, and thus fearful of touch. In short, they use it as a hideout, pass the night there, rejecting nocturnal games. Or they have decided to forget it, to do without their own suburbs. They seem bewildered, their gaze melancholy, like that of someone about to escape into action. Sometimes, it is worse. They throw aside the body like a shortcut they do not comprehend. Omission is so difficult. Say that their vague, timorous gestures have a tenderness . . .

IV

Their favorite vice is sending messages. To ruffle time, penetrate its thickness (the back of it). To inundate the earth they have left with detailed messages, drawings that would flame if need be, writings as tendentious as dreams. To summon up the fish, tales of families burned by their enemies, the confused prestige enjoyed by their mutinous vessels, the itinerary of the sea that is a consolation and a mantle to which the ships succumb. Like one who knows how to forge a rebuke, make use of anything (except adversity: tragedy should be told in whispers, said Odin). What the messages say is unimportant, they have forgotten. It is important that the others do not notice their absence, or the equivalent, that they become too aware of it. That they catch sight of the travelers, in a waterspout, or in emanations, undiminished by events, perceive them—sharpened by perspective—and restore to them a less confused (more innocent) measure of themselves. That they convert them, if necessary, into legend, that muffled form of memory, or into an augury of things to come. That they rescue them from becoming that frayed image to which

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they have yet to emigrate and which is empty and as strange as a country to which one returns. That they defend them from what they are (if they are anything), save them from lagging behind what they would wish to be . . .

V

Foreseeable that the gods would remain aloof, mediators of themselves, so overfull they were of monologuing with their own invulnerability and of lavishing fitful destiny on men. But no. They have watched the rivals vow on the lava plains of Thinvellir, and then, entranced, observed the labors of combat. Afterwards, now halfway through the afternoon, with a peculiar accentuation, like one who awakens passion without abandoning composure, they decide to reward the best (the most quarrelsome), by draining valor from him so that he crosses the frontier of death. All this, while sometimes shrugging their shoulders or with a sudden smile, but without elevating the men to any maxim (without loving them), somewhat magnanimous, as if they were to toss a mantle of astonishment over them or abided only by the fever of their own imagination. Odin presides at the funeral. He is careful to keep the contagion of emotion from the gods, preaching by example . . .

VI

Skald's testament: "I know it is not enough. That I write mere surveys with conclusions, lacking outbursts, circular evasions through the fog, not human beings, only vestiges. That loneliness is illusory. That I have not been able to celebrate. I go backward. I don't want dignity, not even a mute violence that fails to transform me into a nest of repetitions, a form as vague as time. Though malice may not be my portion, perplexity shall be (when I fill fiction to the brim). I shall be so intense that the beating of my heart will flood everything, between me and what I see nothing will remain, no multitude, no

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sound. I may not know how to seduce but I will dazzle. (Nothing will distract me from pain.) You have to wait. Have to wait for me to renounce (brilliant) rigidity, for me to submit, hidden from my own eyes, to the shadow of desire. Halfway would be enough. The only imperative is that you go on waiting (. . .)"

—translated from the Spanish
by Anne Twitty

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Five Poems by Alan Michael Parker

The Sears Catalogue

Because somebody's father bought a house
sided in aluminum, blue as a robin's egg,
and lived in it through two wars, buying

plaid shirts and dusky work boots, day and night
a shot and a beer. Because, as Emerson says,

"the only thing grief has taught me is to know
how shallow it is." Because the pages always
curl with use as though they were burning slowly.

Because you can go to town or stay at home
and your kids can go to town or stay at home

and their kids. Because the women in their bras
peek through the window of a boy's adolescence, giggling.
Because, and it's Emerson again, "Souls never touch

their objects." Because somebody's father
lives in a blue house but can't make himself care

for doing the lawn, for edging, for raking leaves
curbside, piling the coins of a lost Empire.
Because the sky has its suburbs, its planned

communities and empty public plazas,
its strip malls gray with buckled sidewalks;

and the sky, too, has its heavy book,
fat with the glossy photos of someone else's dream,
blistering, sulphurous with what must come.

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Recessional

Dim sum for two, and the ancient waitress
shrieks for everyone to eat the eats
which steam within her bamboo bassinet;
doughy dumplings rolled like boxing gloves

around each tiny fist of pork, hoisin sauce
plashing in a shallow dish. One price
buys all this free-for-all, as a six-foot
hostess dressed in fire

breathes each name through her nose
into a cordless microphone.
Who's to blame? He knew
his ex-wife always brings her mother here;

she knew that moo shu pork
remains his singular post-coital consolation,
(a fact she volunteered in court).
Now the lazy Susan spins the hot

and sour soup, each potent pepper flake
suspended in an oily gyre. There—
across the restaurant he drops his napkin,
and she can only make herself ignore

that mess she used to love.
She turns to ask for more: the chopsticks
chatter in her hand as somewhere else
his napkin folds its wings upon the floor.

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Hush

The Kosher bakery on Friday morning
fills its orders with a prayer—the long,
lean baker's fingers braiding challah,
kneeding loaves of fleshy, sour rye
into that extra inch the appetite
knows better than to take. There
two counterwomen smile and bicker,
aprons stained and yet unspotted
by sweet flour, sweet failure,
a daughter married off, a son gone bad.
Hush. The picture window fogs with smell
as all the pretense of the world I want
glistens, redolent with circumstance;
as all the Heavens were a Bell.

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The Ticket

Pulled over, parked, indicted by the high
beams flashing in her rearview mirror, pure
as loss, the car refracted to a blur,
she shuts her eyes and climbs in, down the spine's
white rungs to where there are no crimes but love.
A pool of water. Sumac, cypress, elm.
The perfect ease of fish in perfect tombs.
She hugs her knees, her sky, her soul's small proof
it is—and then, *Yes*, *Officer*, she feels
her mouth apologize. *I know*, *I was* . . .
She climbs back up the ladder to the phrase
marinated in its alcohol.
Yes, *Officer*, *I know*. *I was*, *I know*.
But oh God, *I can't make myself slow down*.

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Days Like Prose

Epistemology, and all the afternoon
clouds perform their dying, tusks and trunks
dissolving in a rivulet of cold wind,

the sky a promise darkening.
Will it rain? The rain says it will
as thunder pools in every vowel,

beading in the wild raspberry patch.
Epistemology, and through the sliding
glass door of the moment

here is what I think: a man loves
being loved, shirtless on the lawn,
singing the song of a fat life,

of giddy children trampling the lavender.
I close his eyes as the red darkness
blooms inside, the sky recurring

just so—and deeper in the night
when the planes come out to fly,
their windows clean with dreams,

and the dead heroes jostle
in too-brilliant tombs, I shall sleep
the cool sleep of the unexamined,

and I shall pray the dizzy wheel
might spin again. Epistemology,
the evening mist sprawls in the grass,

the happy roaring dandelions
bow with dew. Here, I plan
to give up planning, watch the seagulls

dive for shiners in the foam
—where the neap tide unravels as
a warning buoy bobs beyond the known.

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Four Sapphics by John Burt

Formalities

You were gravely pulling up his best necktie,
Smoothing down his collar for that calm journey.
He drew off the body, a limp, soiled garment,
With no assistance.

Water

Once, and only fleetingly, did I see her
Bend at spring-side, shivering like a willow.
Then she vanished. Still I will drink that water,
Cool, welling always.

Love

Down they all fall; everything growing withers.
Faithful lovers perish before their love does.
When that time comes, you will be nothing to me.
I will be nothing.

A Spring Night

Nightlong branches over me shift in trouble.
I breathe sweet air. Love makes me foolish, hopeful,
Blows me kisses, cold from the mouths of lilies
Where he is buried.

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Two Poems by George Bradley

Museum-Quality Amour

It didn't want your sympathy and had no need
Of affection, the hot breath of your infatuate regard.
A building razed, a jungle come, river run to dust,
It proved impervious to flattery as to compassion,
Was unimpressed alike by tears and delicate demand.
Evaporated ocean of time already ticked,
Crumbled cenotaph of consummated things,
It could not be won by favor or made to feign concern
For your childlike intentions, the grubby underwear
Of hope, the essential adolescence of the quick.
No one offered up the parchment you embraced,
The mummified panjandrum, the fossilized ideal,
That unflappable decorum wrapped in its waxy sheet
And laid in the sarcophagus of obsolescent days;
The withered cheek you pecked had never been inclined,
Yet you whispered blandishments, nuzzled the deaf ear,
Clutched the granite vacancy, and what choice did you have?
Whose every word was echo, whose very memory was rote,
Your little crush on the grotesque did not admit of cure;
Couched on that rupestral breast, the marble embonpoint
Of hours, you broke your heart for its achievement,
For the *belle dame sans souci*, the unexpectant fact
Which was the past and the way the world appeared,
And which would never love you back.

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Progress of Myth at East Haddam

Like doe-skin mittens, mottled marigold
And pinned up by the roadside on display,
Trembling hands the silver birches hold
Applaud the denouement of autumn day;
Like light shed from a gothic altarpiece,
Gold leaf streaked with scarlet underpaint,
The maples' glory is their own release,
A martyrdom tricked out to tempt a saint;
Like battered bindings of maroon morocco,
Like remnants of antique upholsteries,
Like flutterings of copper birds that flock to
Leave, the brightness falling from the trees
Reminds us that our world is metaphor:
A Golden Age will pass us by once more.

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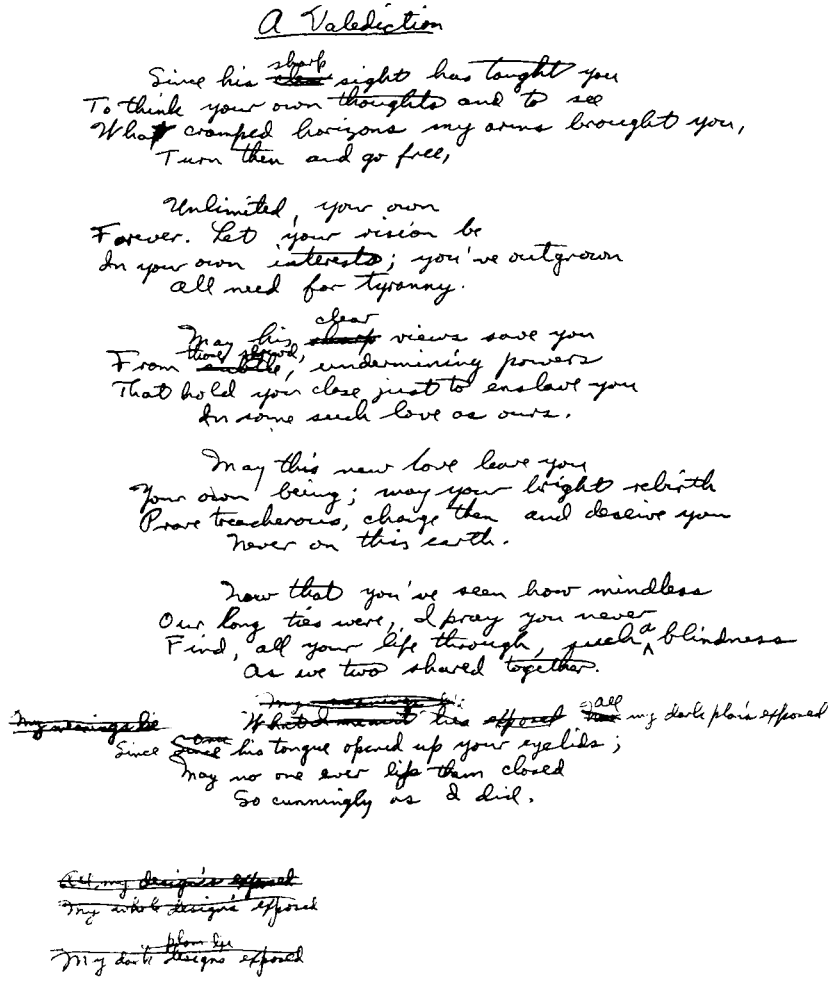
A Valediction
Since his sight has taught you
To think your own thoughts and to see
What cramped horizons my arms brought you,
Turn then and go free,
Unlimited, your own
Forever. Let your vision be
In your own interests; you've outgrown
all need for tyranny.
May this clear views save you
From undermining powers
That hold you close just to enslave you
In some such love as ours.
May this new love leave you
Your own being; may your knight rebirth
Prove treacherous, change then and deceive you
Never on this earth.
Now that you've seen how mindless
Our long ties were, I pray you never
Find, all your life through, such a blindness
As we two shared together.
Since his tongue opened up your eyelids;
May no one ever lips them closed
So cunningly as I did.
A Valediction

A manuscript page from "A Valediction" by W.D. Snodgrass.

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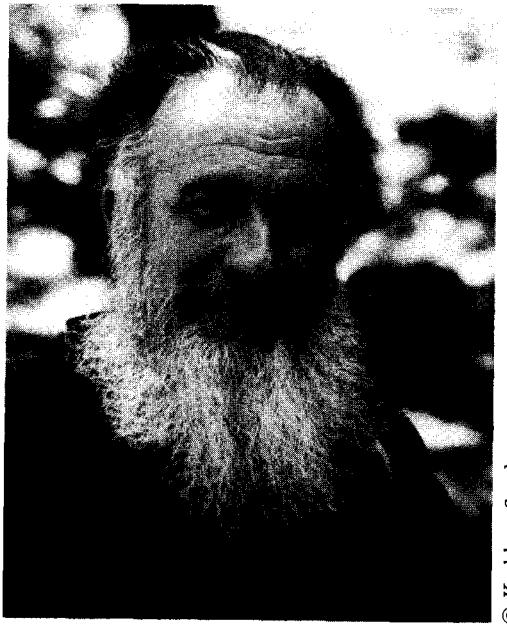

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W.D. Snodgrass

The Art of Poetry LXVIII

W.D. Snodgrass received one of his profession's highest honors early on in his career when he won the Pulitzer Prize in poetry in 1960, for his first book of poems, Heart's Needle. *Yet the winning of this coveted prize brought numerous pressures and seductions. Snodgrass struggled with a writer's block. His marriage fell apart. He lost friendships, due, he felt, to jealousy over his winning the prize.*

Nevertheless, Snodgrass continued to write. Though in the past his poems often took years—sometimes eight, sometimes twenty—more recently he has become fairly prolific, in one case producing twenty-eight poems in twenty-four days. All

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told, his output of poems and essays has been impressive. Sixteen books of poetry followed Heart's Needle, *including* After Experience, Selected Poems *and two collaborative books with paintings by De Loss McGraw:* W.D.'s Midnight Carnival *and* The Death of Cock Robin. *In addition, Snodgrass has published six books of translations with an emphasis on Romanian and Hungarian folk songs, a book of essays on the writing process,* In Radical Pursuit, *and scores of uncollected poems, reviews and essays. His life's work, however, is* The Führer Bunker, *a cycle of poems begun twenty-five years ago and still in progress, written in the voices of Hitler and his henchmen and henchwomen. In a series of villanelles and triolets Magda Goebbels explains why she killed her children when it was clear Germany was losing the war. Hitler describes his sexual obsessions. Stripped of his command, Himmler tries to predict his future. Part of the cycle was published in 1977 as a work in progress, and the completed text is forthcoming next fall from BOA Editions.*

In addition to the Pulitzer, Snodgrass has received numerous honors, including an Ingram-Merrill Award, a grant from the National Institute of Arts and Letters and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the Academy of American Poets.

Born on January 5, 1926 in Wilkinsburg, Pennsylvania, Snodgrass studied music before transferring to the University of Iowa writing program and discovering poetry there. He went on to teach at several universities, including Syracuse University, which he left in 1979, later joining the faculty of the University of Delaware, where he is now Distinguished Professor of Creating Writing and Contemporary Poetry. Winters, Snodgrass and his fourth wife, Kathy, live in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, where, Snodgrass says, away from the psychological confines of his "fatherland," he writes more freely.

This interview was conducted in the fall of 1992, at Snodgrass's summer home in Erieville, New York, and includes sections of earlier interviews. The conversation took place in his living room, which is decorated with colorfully painted

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papier-mâché Mexican dragons and paintings by the Mexican painter Ferman Rodriguez. Snodgrass sat in a large armchair, his back to the window that overlooks an old apple orchard, sipping coffee and frequently punctuating his conversation with his remarkable, rumbling laugh. The family dog, Buford, a terribly shy and insecure English mastiff, kept an uneasy vigil at his feet throughout the interview.

INTERVIEWER

When we first set up this interview, you explained to me that it would be difficult for me to find your books, even in the libraries. Why is that the case?

W.D. SNODGRASS

I'm not exactly the height of fashion.

INTERVIEWER

You were fashionable when you won the Pulitzer Prize in 1960 for *Heart's Needle*.

SNODGRASS

Not really *when* I won it; maybe a little afterward. But it's freakish that I won it. Whether you get prizes or not has nothing to do with whether you're any good. It just so happens that the chief judge at that time, Louis Untermeyer, liked my work very much, and he gave it to me. But it cost him the judgeship. The following year he was forced out. There were really only two people who were in favor of me. One was Caleb Bingham, who published one of the most important papers in the South, and who was a real reader of poetry; most of the others were journalists who didn't care about literature. But Louis Untermeyer was the man who really decided it. That year—I learned all this much later—the others decided it had to go for light verse. They had a kind of anti-intellectual and anti-artistic meeting and said: "After all, light verse sells more than anything else." Bingham and Untermeyer said, "We're

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not here to decide who sells most." So I got it, but the following year it was given to Phyllis McGinley, which was horrifying; she used to write little silly verses for *The Saturday Evening Post*. The sad thing is that Ogden Nash didn't have a book come out either of those years, because certainly he deserved a major award and never got one. Once I got that, of course, most reviewers praised the book to the skies. But then of course they held it against me. If they all praise your first book, you can be sure that they will then all attack your second book violently. That's the way those things always go.

INTERVIEWER

How did you feel when you won it?

SNODGRASS

Actually my then-wife got the news, she was at home. One of the newspapers called up and said, "Is this the Snodgrass that just won the Pulitzer Prize," and she said, "Jesus, I hope so."

INTERVIEWER

So up until that point, had you wanted to become famous?

SNODGRASS

Of course. Although, that was not the primary target. You know, if you want to become famous, you write schlock. Crap. There's always a market for that. The problem is, you would like to write the stuff you want to write and still get all the rewards of writing junk. You want it both ways. You want it all.

INTERVIEWER

What changes when you win a prize like the Pulitzer?

SNODGRASS

Well, before, you couldn't get jobs, nobody would publish your stuff. Overnight that all changes. You're being offered

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important jobs, everybody wants you for dinner, everybody wants you for bed—instead of friends, you have people who want to chalk you up on their scorecard.

INTERVIEWER

Did you adjust?

SNODGRASS

I went through about eight years of psychoanalysis in Detroit. My second marriage then broke up.

INTERVIEWER

How did the award destroy the marriage?

SNODGRASS

I don't want to speak very specifically about this since it is a private matter involving others than myself. Getting such an award, though, is liable to work a major change in one's life. The award itself was quite small at that time—five hundred dollars if I remember correctly—but, as I've said earlier, completely changed the tenor of my life. Such a change (whether for the better or worse) is liable to threaten a marriage. It's like winning a war—former allies can then afford infidelities, jealousies, betrayals, demands, backbiting, nastinesses which the existence of external enemies helped to control.

INTERVIEWER

And what about your work?

SNODGRASS

I became unable to work.

INTERVIEWER

Were you afraid to work? Did you feel that the next book had to be great?

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SNODGRASS

It's really that I was afraid the next one *would be*.

INTERVIEWER

Why?

SNODGRASS

That kind of success brings too much power. It's really easy to fantasize about all the things you'd like to have, you'd like to do. Then suddenly you can be all those things. You could do all the terrible things you fantasized about. There are women knocking on your door at night, lining up outside taking a number; you have money enough to live on for a change, and you can influence what books publishers take, who gets awards; you have a lot of weight to throw around. Also, you know that nobody will like your having got this. In particular, your friends, the people you counted on, are going to hate you for it. The very people you would have thought would be pleased are not. They're upset *they* didn't get it. You no longer have your lover, your wife, your best friends. They're all upset. And you know everybody hates you, because you remember how much you hated the people who got prizes before.

INTERVIEWER

When did the reviewers start giving you a hard time?

SNODGRASS

Oh, from some quarters, right away. The second book, *After Experience*, was attacked right and left. Half of the reviewers gave me hell because it was exactly like the first book; the other half gave me hell because it was very different from the first book. When my book of essays, *In Radical Pursuit*, came out, my editor said, "I hear you will get the National Book Award." The head of *The New York Times Book Review* wrote me and said, "I didn't think I'd ever want to read another essay on Dante, Dostoyevsky, Cervantes; you made it all new."

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So I thought, "My God, I'll get the cover." I got no review. In the meantime, a nasty review came out in *The New York Review of Books* that said, "There's nothing wrong with these essays except the author's character." And after that, other reviewers lost their nerve, I think, and chickened out. Most didn't review it at all. It was never actually considered for the National Book Award. Six other books were put up. I'm willing to believe there was a better book of criticism that year, but I don't believe there were six. When *The Führer Bunker* came out I was told, "You will get the National Book Critics Circle Award." Then Robert Lowell died. My teacher. So *he* had to have all the awards. Later, one of the judges told me, "We had already decided the award for you." Boy. It was very upsetting.

INTERVIEWER

How did you handle the writer's block? Were you afraid to get out of bed and go to your typewriter?

SNODGRASS

Exactly. Stay up all night, sleep all day. One way and another burn your time away. I became an absolute master of filing my nails. The best looking nails in the country.

INTERVIEWER

To go back, your first teacher at Iowa was Paul Engle. You once said that his class on Rimbaud "just blew you away." Was this the experience that led you to become a poet?

SNODGRASS

I don't think there was any one experience that did that. Over a period of time I began to believe more and more I could do it. As to that class, we looked at *Memoire* by Rimbaud and *The Drunken Boat*, *Le bateau ivre*, but more particularly *Memoire*. I was just astounded that in creating a landscape, a scene, Rimbaud managed to give you all kinds of meaning about his life, about his relations with his mother, about the relation between his mother and his father. It had never oc-

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curred to me that one could do something of that sort. In almost all the courses I was taking I was finding possibilities of meaning that I hadn't imagined. It was extremely exciting, but it scared me blue. I didn't say word one for two years. I didn't want to write like Rimbaud. I think for a little while I might have tried to write like the early Lorca. It was clear I wasn't able to write like Rimbaud. I think I wasn't disassociated—that much—from my society, and I don't think I could move my language that far away from the language of normal discourse. But gradually I came to think, "Okay, I believe I can write something that will be a poem."

INTERVIEWER

You wrote *Heart's Needle* before Robert Lowell, who was one of your teachers at Iowa, wrote *Life Studies*. This makes you the first of what M.L. Rosenthal termed the confessional poets.

SNODGRASS

I never cared for the term *confessional* in the least. Without any disrespect to M.L. Rosenthal, I think it's a journalistic tag, not very accurate. It sounds either like you're some kind of religious poet, which I am not, or as if you write bedroom memoirs, and I hope I don't come under that heading.

INTERVIEWER

Why did you get that tag?

SNODGRASS

My poems were called confessional because I wrote about the facts of my own life, and particularly about losing a daughter in a divorce; you weren't supposed to do that then. You also weren't supposed to use your own name. But of course Lorca had! Right away I thought of that line of his, "Aye, Frederico, call the civil guard!" I thought "Well, why can't I put my name in a poem if he can?"

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INTERVIEWER

What prompted this direction? Addressing the loss of your daughter in poetry, for example?

SNODGRASS

I was very much moved by a cycle of songs by Gustav Mahler called *Kindertotenlieder*, *Songs for the Death of Children,* with texts from the poet Friedrich Ruckert. First I tried to translate those songs and wasn't very successful. Then I started trying to write my own poems. Of course, we don't very often lose children through death anymore. We lose them in divorces. So that made a different situation.

INTERVIEWER

How do you account for the opposition to autobiographical work like this?

SNODGRASS

Everybody was listening to T.S. Eliot then. He said that poetry wasn't personality, but the *escape* from personality. They ignored the next sentence, which said that you have to have a personality in the first place to want to escape from. Nobody wanted to hear that. I was greatly influenced by my psychotherapy at the time, and by Randall Jarrell's criticism of my work. First of all, Jarrell didn't like those of my poems which had been praised by other critics—Allen Tate, Cleanth Brooks, John Ransom, Robert Lowell. He liked a couple of my translations—one from Rilke and one from Ovid—which I'd thought of as academic exercises. He thought the *rest* of my pieces were academic exercises. I was amazed to find that he cared about the story—what was happening in the poem. Above all, he helped get me out from under Lowell's influence. He said, "Snodgrass, do you know you're writing the very best second-rate Lowell in the country?" Nothing against Lowell, it's just that I'd stayed under his influence long enough. In general, Jarrell helped me get away from a sort of high-flown and over-intellectualized language which, by now, seems to

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me pretty pretentious. He said, "What are you trying to do, turn yourself into a fireworks factory?" Actually, his criticism was very cruel and full of mockery. But he was right.

INTERVIEWER

Was Jarrell's teaching style like that? Cruel, but insightful?

SNODGRASS

He and Robert Lowell were brilliant but in very different ways. You had the feeling that Lowell was an intelligence; you had the feeling that Jarrell was a sensibility—that it wasn't a matter of grand ideas or anything of that sort with Jarrell, but rather that he knew exactly what this or that choice of language meant about your qualities as a person. I remember that he once spent ten minutes talking about one line out of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock": "My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—" He doesn't dare say anything without immediately countering it by something opposite for fear someone might attack or criticize. When he says, "My necktie rich," he's proud of it. But then he thinks, "Oh, my God, we rich people must be modest." So he says, "but modest." Rich and modest. But then he thinks, "That's my trouble. I'm too modest. I've got to learn to assert myself: 'but asserted.'" Then he thinks, "Oh, my God I can't stand assertive people!" so he adds, "by a simple pin." And of course "simple" is just marvelous because it's the farthest thing from what he is. Jarrell talked about that line for ten minutes. This was an entirely different kind of richness from what you got from Lowell. But tremendously invigorating and enlightening.

INTERVIEWER

When you wrote *Heart's Needle* you were, in effect, breaking from your teachers. How did you find the courage to do that?

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SNODGRASS

Lowell was very upset about this at first. Later he changed his mind, and his support finally got *Heart's Needle* published when nobody would touch it. But at the time he didn't like it. He said, "Snodgrass, you mustn't write this tear-jerking stuff! You've got a brain!"

INTERVIEWER

Didn't it seem at the time like an act of courage?

SNODGRASS

I don't think it was a matter of courage at all, although it meant opposing my teachers whom I respected very highly. But I looked at the stuff I was doing and thought, I don't want to go on writing more second-rate Lowell. I'd rather make a really big mistake. I didn't find it easy to oppose Lowell in this, but on the other hand, I went into psychotherapy because I hadn't been able to write anything for two years. In that therapy I ended up deciding that I wasn't writing about anything I cared about. We had all kinds of subjects we were supposed to write about, most of them derived from people like T.S. Eliot: "the loss of myth in our time." I just didn't really care about that. If I'd wanted a myth, I'd have gotten one.

INTERVIEWER

It had no meaning for you.

SNODGRASS

No. When they asked me, "What *does* interest you?" it was that I couldn't see my daughter. She could be taken away from me. I found that almost unbearable. So I thought, okay, I *do* feel better if I write about this. I don't mean that poetry ought to be therapeutic. I'm not sure that that follows at all. But right then, I felt that at least I was doing something that nobody else had done—recently, anyway. If I had known some of Thomas Hardy's poems about his dead wife, *Poems of 1912*

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and 1913, I probably wouldn't have written mine. They're really fairly similar in their techniques and what they try to do. If I'd known these, I probably would have thrown myself under a taxi!

INTERVIEWER

Since Lowell didn't like *Heart's Needle* at first, how could he have been a positive influence?

SNODGRASS

In the first place, it wasn't his business to be right all the time. It was his business to get me to write better. He may have been wrong sometimes about what "better" is—most of us are. Randall Jarrell may have had more influence there, I think, than Lowell did. But on the other hand, up until that point, Lowell had been an enormous help. When we looked at poems, his responses were incredibly rich. For example, I took a Greek poetry workshop taught jointly by him and Gerald Else, who was then probably the nation's leading classicist. We did the *Iliad*, six lines a day. The whole class was made up of poets. For the first forty-five minutes every day, Lowell would talk about these six lines, just throwing out the most incredible and marvelous ideas. Then for the second forty-five minutes, Gerald Else would tell us what they were *really* about, and it was always quite different, but also wonderful. We learned what constituted an adequate response to a work of art, and that our own responses, up to that point, had never been adequate.

INTERVIEWER

Lowell was helping you to see.

SNODGRASS

Yes. A friend of mine said that when Lowell did a poem in the workshop, it was like having an octopus come and sit down on the thing: it would send out one arm and grab—Philosophy. And it would send out another arm and grab—

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Mythology. Another would haul in Sociology. One after another he'd pull in all these different fields. You'd think, "This man is as crazy as they told me. My poor little poem doesn't have anything to do with all this." And then he'd start tying them all together, and you would see he was right. You'd walk out of there just staggered. Then you'd meet him on the street two days later, and he would sort of hover over you and say, "Listen, I've been thinking about that poem of yours. You know the one with the rather grand language—"(that was description, not praise; that meant it was maybe a little pretentious) "—I was all wrong about that. Here's what it's really about." And he'd be off again with a whole new set of theories. When the man's mind was working, it was just unbelievable. I'd never been around a mind, such a gigantic piece of machinery as that. It was just marvelous. But that didn't mean he was right all the time.

INTERVIEWER

Were you close to Lowell after Iowa?

SNODGRASS

Not for quite a long time. I really had to stop reading him to escape. Before I got going in my own direction, I was imitating him too much.

INTERVIEWER

How about John Berryman? You've mentioned him many times.

SNODGRASS

I had less contact with him because when he came to Iowa my own private life was in a mess; I was working in the hospital or in other places and was seldom able to attend his class, although I was signed up for it. I did get there from time to time. He seemed to me no less brilliant than Lowell, and in quite different ways. For Berryman, the poem and the development of a voice was much more related to development in

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the personality. For instance, he said that you start out by trying to find your voice, but once you've found it then you have to start looking for the *opposite* of your voice. Then you have to synthesize those. So this meant sort of tampering with your life. Of course he did that a lot, you know, with bad behavior and drunkenness and women and what not. I think he saw all of that as part of the process, but it has destroyed more than a few people. I think he probably got it directly from Dylan Thomas. But it's been there for centuries. Next the women picked it up and they had to be hate filled and drunken and suicidal.

INTERVIEWER

Now that you are an established poet and a teacher, what advice do you give to aspiring writers?

SNODGRASS

If you can, get out. Everything else in the world pays better. Everything else in the world costs less, not only in terms of money but in terms of damage to your life. Everything else in the world is more justly rewarded. If you can be happy doing something else, the chances are you will be happier doing something else.

INTERVIEWER

And if they insist?

SNODGRASS

Then they're life-termers.

INTERVIEWER

And do you have any advice for them as they go off to serve their life sentence?

SNODGRASS

No. They have to find something that is particularly their own. Sometimes, as a teacher, I can guess something about

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what that is. Or I can say, "I don't think you're finding what's your own. I think you're finding what's fashionable, but you've got to go beyond that."

INTERVIEWER

You've said that you write better and faster when you're in a different country. Tell me more about that.

SNODGRASS

My wife and I go to Mexico every winter. One time I went planning to work on the poems about the Third Reich, and instead I did all the poems about the death of Cock Robin, the ones based on paintings by DeLoss McGraw. They came very quickly. Ordinarily, a poem takes me eight or ten years.

INTERVIEWER

Ten years? How so?

SNODGRASS

"Ordinarily" may be an exaggeration. On the other hand, I'm never surprised when a poem takes that long. After all, there's no rule about how long a poem takes—if Horace thought ten years was right, that may be right. Again, some poets—Thomas Hardy, Bill Stafford—didn't revise much or at all. They just wrote a new poem. That's a matter of the individual psyche. I find that my second thoughts—or my fifth or eighth—are frequently better than the first ones. And a combination of the first and the tenth may be best and richest. But the last time I went to Mexico, I did twenty-eight poems in twenty-four days; twenty-six poems for an alphabet I was doing for DeLoss McGraw and two extras. I couldn't believe it. It helps a lot just to be out of the United States. It sort of liberates you in strange ways. I had a psychoanalyst in Detroit, who said, "I once had a very classical borderline case." (Borderline case means you don't know if it's neurotic or psychotic. This was a different kind of borderline.) His patient, as long as he was in the United States, was hopelessly

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impotent. If he crossed the border to Canada he was scandalously functional. You're out of the mother country. You're out of the fatherland. You're out of the place where your basic restraints were formed. And suddenly you just feel freer, looser.

INTERVIEWER

When you're writing, what comes first to you?

SNODGRASS

You'll have to ask me about specific poems. It's never the same way twice. You do it anyway you can. Sometimes it doesn't happen. I used to say that if I got through a poem without having an inch-and-a-half-thick pile of worksheets I was very lucky. Sometimes in recent years that hasn't been true. Especially since I've been working together with DeLoss McGraw. Maybe I feel challenged: he's so prolific. He turns out four or five paintings a week. He's unbelievable. Not that I think I ever got quite like that, but I find it pushing me to turn out more things faster. But they're a different kind of poem, virtuoso pieces. Not finger exercises, but, since they are usually comic on the surface, they come to be a kind of high-wire act. A kind of display piece. That kind of thing somehow tends to lend itself, at least for me, toward being a good deal more prolific. Quite a few of those poems will come in a burst. Some of these that I've been doing with McGraw I write in a night.

INTERVIEWER

Do you find metrical form constraining?

SNODGRASS

Of course it's constraining in some ways, but it's the kind of constraint that can be very liberating. I don't mean to be talking in paradoxes, but there is a paradox there.

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INTERVIEWER

Well, free verse can be intimidating because it has no boundaries, so the opposite can be said for the metrical form.

SNODGRASS

Sure. And free verse seems to me finally more demanding. Although to write any poetry at all is hard enough.

INTERVIEWER

So there's no form that you prefer to work in?

SNODGRASS

I would like to find a completely new kind of form, or a new kind of free verse, but I don't think I'm finding it at the moment. I suppose one would always like to start all over again and do something that nobody ever did. I suppose I will be thinking on my deathbed: "Why don't I start all over again, and . . ."

INTERVIEWER

Your work has such a wide range of content and of form, yet you seem to be forever typed as the confessional poet. How do you feel about that?

SNODGRASS

I don't like it, but I don't know what else to say about it. Composers find that sort of thing; there'll be some piece that people always want them to play but that they're sick and tired of. I guess you can't complain too much as long as somebody likes something!

INTERVIEWER

What is the hardest part of writing a poem?

SNODGRASS

Which poem? I don't think you can answer that about poems in general. It's never the same twice. Even for one's

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own poems. Surely what you find about your own poems isn't going to apply to someone else's.

INTERVIEWER

When I read your essays on writing, I have a sense of real playfulness. As though you enjoy the journey and exploration of making a poem as much as the end result.

SNODGRASS

I don't know. It's pretty hard work, and it's pretty frightening work. It's very stressful. Why else be hypertensive? And there's always the fear that you can't do it. You want to do something different. You want to do something new. And if you find that you've done that, of course that's a satisfaction—for about ten minutes. But then there are all those other things you've started and haven't finished, all yelling, "Write me! Write me!" I guess I can't say that I feel that writing's fun, but I am in *real* pain if I don't do it. It's like smoking used to be for me: I never really enjoyed smoking. I never got over having morning sickness with my first cigarette everyday. But I felt worse if I didn't do it. It's the same way with writing. You crave it. If you don't do it, nobody can live with you. *You* can't live with you! People talk a lot about the pleasures of the creative life. They never tried it! It would never replace sex! It won't even replace alcohol! Yet it's the only thing I've found that I'm able to do. I had a very privileged childhood, a very privileged life in many ways. If I'm not doing something to pay that off, I can get to feeling pretty wretched. And I treat people wretchedly. And things get awful.

INTERVIEWER

Did you get a lot of flack from your family about being a writer?

SNODGRASS

Oh, heavens, yes. As far as my father was concerned, that meant being feminine. The paradoxes of all this are outra-

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geous. Now I get accused of being sexist because I take a rather old-fashioned masculine role. Women writers are complaining now that women writers were discriminated against. When I was young, everybody saw writing, especially poetry, as something particularly feminine.

INTERVIEWER

What did your father do?

SNODGRASS

He was an accountant.

INTERVIEWER

Did he ever come to terms with your profession?

SNODGRASS

Not really. I think he always found my being a poet hard to put up with.

INTERVIEWER

Even when you were being praised?

SNODGRASS

Particularly when I was being praised. I think he found that difficult, although he saw that there wasn't anything that could be done about it and there weren't any good arguments against it, because even if I wasn't earning money at his level I was keeping alive.

INTERVIEWER

Do you work every day?

SNODGRASS

I try to, but I don't actually do it. I try to get up early. When you get old you quit sleeping, or at least when I got old I quit sleeping. I wake up often at five or six in the morning, so I figure, okay, the first thing every morning I will go to my desk and put in at least an hour or two. And I do. Sometimes.

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INTERVIEWER

How do you work, with a pencil, typewriter or computer?

SNODGRASS

I have a personal computer and a laser printer in Delaware and a laptop to take to Mexico and a portable Hewlett-Packard printer.

INTERVIEWER

You write your poems first by hand then polish them on the word processor?

SNODGRASS

Often I print them off and make pencil or pen corrections on that. Or sometimes I just do it directly on the machine.

INTERVIEWER

Do you find the word processor liberating—that it lets you work more with the material than you would otherwise?

SNODGRASS

Sure. A whole lot easier.

INTERVIEWER

I know many writers who just won't go near them. They have to have their pencil and paper.

SNODGRASS

Well, the first, early versions of poems I tend to write out longhand. Sometimes I do first versions of prose on the computer. You can run off a copy and take it to bed with you and tinker at it and fiddle around. The next day you put it back on the machine and change it, and move stuff around, and that's a hell of a lot easier than it would be doing that by hand. For a long time we resisted it . . . But when we first went to Mexico we got a little portable Spark and the Hewlett-Packard. We just did so much work that we've been hooked on them ever since . . .

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INTERVIEWER

Your most controversial work is one you've been working on, off and on, for the past twenty-five years, *The Führer Bunker*. In these poems, you speak through the voices of the high Nazis, describing their thoughts and feelings and motivations in incredibly intimate detail. It's very strong stuff. But you've been attacked for writing it. Tell me about that.

SNODGRASS

The Führer Bunker is sort of a compendium of evils. I *have* been attacked. People have even called me a pro-Nazi, which is ridiculous. I have said worse things about the Nazis in those poems than any historian ever said. People feel insulted to begin with that I would take the Nazis as a subject for poetry, although they have always argued, as we all have, that any subject is fit for poetry. Above all, they are upset that I treat them as human beings. They don't want to see that the Nazis were human, because that might mean that they have some relationship to them. I've been accused of humanizing the Nazis, to which I can only say, you can't blame me for that. God did that. Go talk to him. It's a strange thing for an atheist to say.

INTERVIEWER

What got you started on the whole series?

SNODGRASS

Being in the war, probably. I started trying to write a play based on Trevor-Roper's book *The Last Days of Hitler*, right after World War II. Having been through that, what else is worth writing about? Apparently you're supposed to make it very plain that evil only exists in others. I don't believe that. I think that by talking about how evil other people are, you talk about how evil we all are. We pretty much share the same good and bad possibilities. When I met Albert Speer, he seemed very much a human being. I enjoyed talking with him. That doesn't mean I believe everything he said.

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INTERVIEWER

Would you have had that feeling if you had talked to Ernst Kaltenbrunner?

SNODGRASS

Oh, no. From what I've read of Kaltenbrunner, I would have thought of him just what I think of brutal, stupid types when I run into them here. Hermann Goering I probably would have both detested and admired. But I would have shot him real quick. I may salute him first, but I'd pull the trigger. Joseph Goebbels had a tremendously brilliant mind. But I sure would wipe him out quick. No, people know they can't accuse me of being pro-Nazi, so mostly they just don't talk about it. I don't see why you shouldn't write poems about the same sort of thing that you write prose pieces about. They seem to assume that to write a poem is in some ways to praise something.

INTERVIEWER

Or to prettify it.

SNODGRASS

Yes. Being familiar with Dante, I don't feel that way. I started out writing these poems with the question, "How could those people have done those things?" And the more I write the more I come to see that we have *all* done things that were comparable.

INTERVIEWER

When you say "we," are you speaking of nations or individuals or both?

SNODGRASS

I was thinking of nations, but I would say individuals also. We are not so different as we claim to be.

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INTERVIEWER

But what distinguishes that particular act of the Holocaust from anything else is the systematic wiping out of an entire people with the consent and support of an entire nation.

SNODGRASS

Well, it wasn't entirely with the consent and approval of the nation. And that isn't so unique as it's often presented to be. Look at the attitudes toward the American Indians a few years ago. "The only good Indian is a dead Indian." Every one of the nations involved against the Nazis has things in its past that take away its privilege to feel too superior to the Nazis. That hardly makes the Holocaust all right. It just means that we're not as much better as we say we are. Look at the history of the British empire, look at the history of the French in North Africa, look at the history of the Jews against the Arabs. The *Führer Bunker* poems may be my real confessional poems—an analysis of one's own evil. I'm inclined to think there isn't much value in pointing to other people's evil.

INTERVIEWER

Writing these poems, did you discover an evil in yourself?

SNODGRASS

Of course. Surely. There's a lot of it. I must say the hardest part to get at is in the Hitler speeches. It's very hard to get into the part of yourself that hates human life that much.

INTERVIEWER

Maybe there isn't any part of yourself that could. Maybe Hitler was one of the few.

SNODGRASS

I don't think so. Because I think I found those parts. It requires a stretch of the imagination because one doesn't like to see the parts of one's self that are that selfish or that sleazy or that cruel. But looking back over one's own history, one

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finds enough things to suggest that one is not altogether above some of these things. You can't be sure what you would do in that kind of position.

There's a kind of general self-righteousness that comes out of winning a war. You get to write the history books. And you get to define what people will think about the war from then on. There's some reason to think that just the fact that you've won the war may disprove your virtue right there. You don't win wars by being virtuous or being less cruel than other people. You win wars by doing things like dropping atomic bombs or destroying cities full of refugees, like Dresden.

INTERVIEWER

Many of the *Führer Bunker* poems are written in forms you created yourself. For instance, in "Heinrich Himmler: Platoons and Files," you created a form that you call the *platoon*. Tell me about its components and how you chose them.

SNODGRASS

In a platoon, there are thirty characters in each line. It's an alphabet acrostic down the left-hand margin. It's all in capitals like a telegram or something. And each stanza is a squad, containing five lines. I wanted to make up a form like this that would be as much like Himmler as possible—a completely arbitrary form with no relation to meaning or to music, no relation to anything. It's just form clamped on the thing.

INTERVIEWER

But it's a military form.

SNODGRASS

Absolutely. But it's a kind of arbitrary form. And the essence of the Nazis' military machine. Whereas, for instance, iambic pentameter and rhyming couplets, things like that, are intimately related to music. Such poetry was originally sung, and it had to have a certain form in order to be sung to such-and-such a melody. In the platoon you have order for its own sake—the essence of Himmler.

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INTERVIEWER

So how do you read these aloud?

SNODGRASS

There's a metronome marking for each one, and I read them against a metronome. As a boy, Himmler spent ten years practicing the piano; his teacher finally came to his parents and said, "Your boy will never make any music." The absence of music and the arbitrariness of the form point toward a certain sterility of mind, which Himmler had if anybody alive ever did. He lived with about the thinnest veneer of a mind that one could imagine.

INTERVIEWER

In the poem each word is separated by a dot. So that when you read it silently or aloud the impulse is to read each word as a complete sentence: "Anyone. Who. Dares. Undertake."

SNODGRASS

Yes. It's like those telephone recordings that say, "THE. NUMBER. YOU. HAVE. CALLED. HAS. BEEN. CHANGED. THE. CORRECT. NUMBER. IS. 7.3.2.5.6.4.9." I don't read it quite like that, but I read it against a metronome. A real musician submits himself to a very rigid sense of order: "You will appear with the note A at such and such a moment. Neither before or after." That can be liberating if you have the right kind of mind. If you don't, it's just order, nothing else. In the case of somebody like Himmler, it comes to a kind of love of order for itself.

INTERVIEWER

And when you started writing "Platoons and Files," did you decide on a form first, or did you decide to impose a form on them as you set out writing them?

SNODGRASS

This form is so arbitrary that I don't think it could grow out of anything else. I started exactly as one would with an

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army: with an idea of what order is. Everyone will line up. We will have seven people across the front here . . .

INTERVIEWER

Did you imagine what Himmler would do if he were told to write a poem?

SNODGRASS

Exactly. And it's called "Files and Platoons" because the files are things that Himmler actually collected—material against the other high Nazis. Material to use against them, exactly as J. Edgar Hoover did here. Indeed, both men used such material with considerable effect. Not all of it is true. For instance, there were rumors that one of Hitler's grandfathers was Jewish. Himmler probably knew this was not true, but nonetheless that rumor was circulating, so he would have kept it in the file in case he'd ever have a use for it, although he would have hidden the fact that he even had a file about Hitler.

INTERVIEWER

And so the subject of those files is also a subject of those poems.

SNODGRASS

Yes. Adolf Hitler comes first—a complete platoon, from A to Z. Bormann is the second, which starts with B; there are only two or three squads (five-line stanzas) there. There are four squads for Eva Braun. One for Hermann Fegelein. Four for Dr. Goebbels, one for Magda. Two for Himmler himself—he collected only praise for himself. One for Jodl. One for Wilhelm Keitel. One for Speer. One for Weidling. The other ones, the platoons, are Himmler's actual speeches.

INTERVIEWER

Magda Goebbels is a collection of poems in Magda's voice, in which she explains why and describes how she kills her

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children as the Third Reich falls around her. Tell me about the forms you chose for *Magda Goebbels*.

SNODGRASS

These are villanelles and triolets—all French romantic love forms that involve lots of repetitions. She was somebody who capitalized upon her own good looks, had a kind of career as a beautiful woman and was involved in different love relationships. Or, rather, very unscrupulous and manipulative sexual or emotional relationships with a very thin veneer of romantic love. But also there is a kind of comparison between the kind of lies that go into romantic love and those that go into politics. If you're telling the truth about something, you only need to say it once. If you're telling a lie, you've got to keep saying it over and over again. That's what she does in these poems. She's convincing herself that she's killing her children as a favor to them. To prevent them from doing that most awful thing: finding that they could live under a different system of government, which she would see as the ultimate disloyalty.

INTERVIEWER

Tell me about the form you chose for her last poem, "Magda Goebbels, 1 May, 1945." How did you arrive at it?

SNODGRASS

Her last poem is meant to be an imitation of a solitaire game where you lay out seven cards and then six and then five and then four and then three and two and one. After she's killed all the children she reenacts their deaths in the solitaire game. She imagines herself talking to an imaginary child, describing the game as she plays it, but what she's really doing is laying those seven children down again and doing away with them one after another—and cheating in the middle of the game. I wrote the earlier poem where Magda kills her children while I was teaching in Norfolk, on what I think was the same night that American women were giving their children cyanide to show how loyal they were to *their* leader

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in the Jonestown massacre. I didn't know it at the time. Four or five days later I found out about it, and I have never checked to be sure it was the same night—because I'm afraid I might find out it wasn't.

INTERVIEWER

When you write in Albert Speer's voice, the form is a triangle. Is that because of his being an architect?

SNODGRASS

Partly, and partly because his poems almost always occur on the stairs. He's usually going in or out of the bunker. But also because he has an obsession with size, with growth, with growing.

INTERVIEWER

Was Speer in prison when you interviewed him as part of your research for the *Führer Bunker* poems?

SNODGRASS

No, he was out. He was living in his family's home, right above the castle in Heidelberg. Beautiful house with wonderful old antique furniture. His nearest neighbor was the American commanding general of all NATO forces. He said, "If you think that's ironic, you should see what happens when I have lunch with Elie Wiesel in Vienna. Everyone stares."

INTERVIEWER

What was your perception of him?

SNODGRASS

In his book there was too much mea culpa that didn't go down awfully well. When I talked to him, that wasn't there. For instance I said to him, "The thing that I'm really interested in here is betrayal. You said that to have joined the Nazi party was a betrayal of your family, of your father and of their liberal ideals and so forth." And he said, "Well, yes, that was a

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betrayal. On the other hand, I was a young man who wanted to build. I had been trained as an architect, and I couldn't build anything anywhere. All of a sudden they gave me the opportunity to build every important building in the whole country. I don't think even my father could have resisted that temptation." I thought, "Oh, now there's the real person talking." He said, "Of course it was rotten. Of course it was a terrible thing to do. But who could resist?" I don't mean that I thought everything he said was true. And since that time Matthias Schmidt's book has appeared showing some of the things he lied about. All the same, it seems to me he was as capable of recognizing his own guilts as many people I know.

INTERVIEWER

What did he think of *The Führer Bunker*?

SNODGRASS

He said, "I wondered how it would come out in your poetic words. Not so far from the real ones."

INTERVIEWER

You've been working on *The Führer Bunker* for at least twenty-five years. Do you consider it your life's work or the most important of your works?

SNODGRASS

The most important, I think.

INTERVIEWER

How many poems do you think there will be altogether when the collection is complete?

SNODGRASS

There are now seventy. I don't think there will be many more whole poems. I will use some of the stuff from the files to introduce each of the different speakers. I'm trying to write some choruses. I might use some quotations from historians.

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I did write two new poems and introduce a new character about a month ago.

INTERVIEWER

Uh oh.

SNODGRASS

Yes. The whole thing is enough to make you tear your hair out because at least half the reason I am out of favor is because of this cycle of poems. I hear that I have incurred great hatred in many areas. People won't say so because they know that most of the attacks won't stand up.

INTERVIEWER

With all the criticism you've had regarding *The Führer Bunker*, why have you kept working on this cycle?

SNODGRASS

Because I, like almost everyone else, find those people fascinating. There's no subject on which more books have appeared than on the Nazis. Except diet.

INTERVIEWER

In a poem about an entirely different subject, "April Inventory," you rewrote the line "I have poems, true to feel" to "I have forces, true to feel." Why?

SNODGRASS

I guess "force" seemed to me a much more comprehensive thing. It's not just that I have poems or a complex of feelings I make into a poem. You want to get in touch with your basic forces.

INTERVIEWER

One of your more recent works is *The Death of Cock Robin*, a collection of poems related to paintings by DeLoss McGraw. I was really struck by the dark side of these poems . . .

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SNODGRASS

Well, good! Good!

INTERVIEWER

It wasn't good! It was horrible! I really felt very uncomfortable reading them, as though I'd entered a world of paranoia and unending persecution.

SNODGRASS

Right!

INTERVIEWER

And I didn't want to keep reading.

SNODGRASS

Well, by getting born you *have* entered a world of unending persecution and darkness and trouble and evil and stuff like that there. But it's also lots of fun.

INTERVIEWER

So was that the goal, to show the good and the bad of the world in these poems?

SNODGRASS

I don't think I started out with any such idea. Heavens. Starting out with such a pretentious and tendentious notion as that would surely result in terrible poems.

INTERVIEWER

Then did those poems just write themselves and fall together into a whole?

SNODGRASS

Yes. I have tended to try to collect them into a more or less coherent narrative.

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INTERVIEWER

Did you pick the paintings at random that you wanted to write about?

SNODGRASS

I picked what I wanted or was able to write about. And that got him doing more paintings, which got me doing more poems, and so forth. We were firing each other off, back and forth. Very often I misunderstood the paintings. He would often misunderstand the poems. That almost always worked well. We were glad for the misunderstanding.

INTERVIEWER

When you wrote these poems, did you write them out of what was going on in you? I can't help but feel that when I'm reading about Mr. Evil who "started the rumor that started the lie—"

SNODGRASS

Well, that related, I would have to say, to things that did happen to me. I can tell you about that particular poem; I was thinking about rumors that got started about me, and in particular that when my third marriage broke up, one of my friends turned against me. He turned against her, also. That poem relates to things I have seen in the world. But I suppose that anything I'm writing does. But I've also seen that people pick a person up when he's down. Some of them. Sometimes.

INTERVIEWER

What about "Coroner's Inquest"?: ". . . an outsider/Or untraditional fore-slider/Who's rejected every guide or/Guideline led by spiritual pride or/Sensual passion through a wider/World than we're allowed."

SNODGRASS

That's just the way I think about artists. They're not accused of being backsliders. They're accused of being fore-sliders.

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Being ahead of their time. Saying what you're not allowed to say. So they're not very much liked.

INTERVIEWER

You see yourself as an outsider?

SNODGRASS

Oh, I don't know. Though I don't think about that very much. I know that people think of artists as outsiders, and in some sense I guess I stand outside my society. I don't believe the things they believe. I'm an atheist. Sometimes I think my mind is failing and I'm getting patriotic. In some ways I'm an outsider and in some ways I'm probably not so unconventional as all that. The chief difference is that I say what you're not supposed to say, admit things people don't want to be true. It does indeed upset them very badly, reaches things in their world that they don't want to say are there. They may be dying of those very things.

INTERVIEWER

What do you mean?

SNODGRASS

In my autobiographical pieces I'm writing about how my sister died of my mother. People don't want to notice that love is that dangerous. But when it gets too powerful and too possessive you *can* die of it. People are trying very hard not to see that. Not to see, for instance, they may have had a very destructive mother. It's gotten fashionable to say you had a very destructive father. But after all a father doesn't have nearly as much power over you as your mother has. If she doesn't like you, you die. And so people get upset with you for saying that. They get upset if you live outside the way society is supposed to live. And for good reason. You may be doing a lot of harm. I would be far from arguing that the arts are good for society. I don't know that they are. Sometimes they are. Sometimes it looks as though they are quite destructive.

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INTERVIEWER

In *W.D.'s Midnight Carnival*, the poem "Wire Walker," the crowd prays for the wire walker's fall: "Cracking your bones back to their level / Like wreched kites or some downcast devil; / Soon as they've handed you their laurel, / Thorn or gold crown, there's a choral / Wail of dissent: 'Are such heights moral?'" This sounds like your experience after getting the Pulitzer Prize. Were you aware of that when you wrote it?

SNODGRASS

You never know for sure what you're aware of when you're writing something, but I think I was aware of that. That's a little too clear and open. Things like that don't usually come out at once. For instance, I felt I had many friends here in Syracuse, and particularly at the university, until I got in trouble.

INTERVIEWER

You got into trouble? What do you mean by that?

SNODGRASS

Well, my third marriage broke up, and I was in a very bad state. Right away people took that opportunity to get a boot in my groin. Up until then those feelings had been pretty well disguised. And I think it was clear also that it wasn't just that I had some recognition as a poet. It was that I was very happily married. And I think people envied and resented that quite a lot. The same sort of thing like when you watch the Olympics or something. Everybody is very quietly hoping for a great collapse. It annoys people to think, "I can't do that. I can't run that fast, and no matter how long I try, I'll never be able to." Just the simple facts of inequality. We would like to believe that people are created equal. They are not.

INTERVIEWER

In poems like "Considerations," you write of man's betrayal of man: "Tell me about the Brotherhood of Man / From what

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I've seen inside *this* family/I'll take an enemy any time I can . . ." Reading poems like that, and many others, like "Right Again," "Hard Times," "A Teenager," "Former Friends," one might think of you as an embittered, angry man. Yet you're always seeming to grow and expand personally and in your work.

SNODGRASS

My impression is that, if I think over the people that I grew up with (and sometimes I go to high school reunions and things like that), I think I've had a lot more trouble than most of them, but I've also had a lot of more fun.

INTERVIEWER

It seems that in your later years you've had a lot more calm and peace and satisfaction in your personal and professional life.

SNODGRASS

I don't know that that's true. Certainly my domestic life is very good. I must say that when that third marriage broke up I didn't think I would ever get my life together again. I was wrong. Never been happier about being wrong. But I wouldn't say that in general things are better than I would expect. I was going to say I'm not complaining, but of course I complain a lot. I would like to have a lot of things that I don't have. I have just about what I thought I would. I'm earning ten times as much as I expected to, but I'm living at just about the level I thought I would. I wouldn't have predicted living out in the middle of the woods or living in an old farmhouse or doing all this work with early music or anything like that. But all those things are very good. Sure, there are a lot of things I'm bitter about, that I think are awful. So, what's new?

INTERVIEWER

But when I talk to you, even when you're complaining, I don't have a feeling of an unhappy person. I have a feeling of a person who's full of life and joy.

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SNODGRASS

That's probably true. That's also in the poems. Probably more in *Cock Robin* and *Midnight Carnival* and things of that sort where there's more play and horsing around. But more often art concerns itself with wounds and troubles. Most of the great poems are either about troubles in love or death and dying. Nobody reads the *Paradiso*; everybody reads *The Inferno*. A great percentage of works of art come out of a sense of trouble with the world. If you didn't feel troubled with it you probably wouldn't go to the effort of making something like that.

INTERVIEWER

How would you like to be remembered one hundred years from now?

SNODGRASS

I'd just like to be remembered a hundred years from now. Vividly!

—**Alexandra Eyle**

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Dabbling in Corruption

W.D. Snodgrass

e. e. cummings once wrote a nasty little jingle:

> mr. u will not be missed
> who as an anthologist
> sold the many on the few
> not excluding mr. u

I don't know what had roused cummings's ire; he was fairly well represented in Untermeyer's anthologies. Untermeyer sometimes overlooked a great poem; seldom a good one. He *did* print some of his own poems, which were not terrible—also his several wives' poems, which *were*. Still if not forgivable, that at least seemed unavoidable. Personally, I was indebted to him and had found him lively, witty and engaging.

Besides, he *was* missed; Oscar Williams took his place. Reviewing Williams's *Little Treasury of Modern Poetry*, Randall Jarrell remarked that "the book has the merit of having a considerably larger selection of Oscar Williams's poems than . . . any other anthology. . . . It takes great courage to like your own poetry almost twice as much as Hardy's." At the

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anthology's next printing (not even the next edition), a copy turned up in Jarrell's mailbox. In it, he found a marker at the place where his own poems *had* been.

Largely because of this exclusion from Williams's collections (soon standard for college courses) Jarrell is still less well-known than such contemporaries as Robert Lowell or Theodore Roethke, though, as I see it, he was a stronger poet. It is sharply ironic that Williams continued to use exactly those poems by Hardy and Whitman—both dismissed by Eliot and in disrepute—which Jarrell had singled out in earlier essays. Thus, Jarrell was able to salvage the reputation of two marvelous poets through his influence on Williams; himself he could not save.

Untermeyer had published his wives' poems. Williams had had only one wife—dead some years before I met him—but he went more than double to promote her. Her poems were in his anthology; her picture (doctored, I am told, to improve the complexion) inside the back cover, cheek by jowl with Pound, Yeats and Eliot.

My friend, the novelist, poet and critic, George P. Elliott, once encountered Williams at a cocktail party in New York. Obsessively punctual, George was the first to arrive; Williams, the second. They had to talk to each other.

"Well, Mr. Elliott, I enjoyed your anthology," said Williams, referring to a collection George had recently edited. "I see only two things wrong with it: you don't have any poems by me or by my wife."

No rejoinder suggested itself; Williams continued: "You do know the poems of Gene Derwood?"

George lied.

"Well, you wouldn't mind if I sent you a copy of her book?" George lied again, wondering what to do with *this* copy. Just then, someone really important entered the room, and Williams started toward him. But then he turned back, his hand extended: "And I hope I'll be able to include some of *your* poems in *my* next anthology?"

Shortly after my first book, *Heart's Needle*, appeared, I

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realized that we had neglected to send Williams a copy, though he had expressed an interest. I wrote my publisher, Knopf, asking who should take care of that. They, who loved to appear above such considerations, replied that they didn't know, but it certainly wasn't *them*! I knew Williams's reputation, yet he'd done me no harm and his support might be important. I asked Knopf to send him a book, charge it to me, and put in a card "Compliments of the Author"—I couldn't get myself to sign it.

It was like dropping, at one step, from a concrete sidewalk into waist-deep muck. Every week something new arrived in *my* mailbox—Williams's book, Derwood's book, a recording for which Williams had coerced various literary figures to read her poems, postcards displaying her hideous portrait busts of Dylan Thomas, of Robert Frost, of Williams himself, each marked "On loan to Harvard University until the year 2000," photo-postcards showing Williams with important personages. One day, a specially odious card arrived showing him with Dylan Thomas, both squinting against a strong light as though they had just crept out of a pub or from under a log. My stepdaughter carried this into the house as if with tweezers, saying, "Oooooooo! When did *they* die?"

I think I did not begin to suspect the varieties of decadence that surround the "po-biz" until I was invited to the National Poetry Festival held at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. during the early 1960s. All the poetry commissars were there—editors, anthologists, directors of writing programs—all scheduled to read their poems to each other. There were also poets. J.V. Cunningham said, over a glass of bourbon, "It's just like a cozy MLA meeting; dogs sniffing each other's haunches. Only, here, no one knows what job he's brown-nosing for!" Randall and Mary Jarrell surveyed one of the official meetings with disgust, then alarm, when they noticed a lady reporter from the BBC carrying a Nagra tape recorder. "We'll grab her," he said. "You run with the recorder. No evidence of this must ever get out of the country!"

I would not claim that poets, gathered at such conferences,

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or out on the poetry-reading circuits, are less lecherous (or less anxious to *seem* lecherous) than other traveling salesmen. Farmer's daughters and poetry groupies lurk in many a landscape. It *is* necessary for an artist to keep open his or her senses and emotions—a doctrine unfortunately liable to narrow and self-serving constructions and in no case conducive to calm relations with spouses and lovers. And such unquiet relations make one only the more susceptible to temptations. Many male poets feel they must live down the image of artist as wimp, or else live down *to* the myth of artist as *hero maudit*, perishing of debauch, drink or dementia. That suicidal myth was helping decimate the poets of the generation before mine—say, Dylan Thomas through John Berryman—who, in turn, passed it on to the women poets of the next.

One knows, more or less, who will be invited to conferences; everyone waits to see who the invitees will invite. Some arrive with wives, even their own, as did Richard Wilbur here. Some appear with more or less permanent lovers; Delmore Schwartz brought a very young woman with whom he then lived in Syracuse. (As his dementia deepened, he kept a number of young women in scattered apartments throughout that city.) Williams usually appeared at conferences with one of the most voluptuous-looking women I ever met. Tall and rangy, she had long blond hairs growing on the rims of her ears. A ceramicist, her name suggested descent from the minor Hungarian nobility. Some years later, I ran into her on the streets of San Francisco and enjoyed the unearned appearance of splendorous debauchery by riding around town with her in a fire-engine red MG and turning up for breakfast at Fanny's Floating Restaurant in Sausalito. Williams, though alone on this occasion, took her to several MLA meetings where he introduced her as a medievalist; it was said she had received offers from two major universities.

Others bring their hopes. You would encounter both the polished seducer totting up his scorecard and the rougher "good ol' boy" who pinched hard, apparently fearful that his brutally lewd propositionings might be accepted. Often, too,

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the mischief-maker who, if he liked you, would try openly to seduce your wife. And restless wives. Early on at this conference, I was approached by a somewhat older, gifted and attractive woman poet whom I had always liked. I wish I could say that a sense of honor, not the absurd glamour of the young, dissuaded me.

When I first arrived in the D.C. train station, I ran into a young girl, a student I'd known at Wayne State in Detroit. She'd been sleeping on the station benches and subsisting on coffee and apples while waiting for a train which was still two days off. Once I was signed in and settled, I went back to invite her to the conference—there would be lots of food and drink, she could hear and meet the big-name poets and, meanwhile, stay with me in the hotel. This, of course, made everyone furious—and I did nothing to dispel their assumptions. I'd have been delighted if something sexual *had* developed; it didn't. She enjoyed the conference; I enjoyed her company—and the envy it provoked. I overheard someone saying, in tones of outrage, "He's got a girl even younger than Delmore's!"

Such envy is easy to rouse and can serve as a substitute for recognition of one's work. Once, at the request of a colleague, I escorted a handsome young women, whom I'd barely met, to a conference at Colgate University. This so enraged James Dickey and Norman Mailer that they nearly had a fistfight with each other—each apparently seeing me as an unworthy opponent. In San Francisco, I once took a lady—also very handsome though nearer my own age—to a party. Days later, an argument erupted over whether she (actually the daughter of a Greek gambler) had been a countess or a princess. My impression is that casual sex can easily be overrated; its reputation and the resulting jealousies offer surer, though no less dangerous, delights.

As for Delmore and his young girlfriend, they got into a quarrel in their Washington hotel room — he was already far into paranoia and madness. When she fled down the hall to spend the night with Richard Wilbur and his wife, Delmore

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began breaking up the furniture and was carted away by the police. I asked Richard the next day what had happened; he said only, "Delmore. He hurt his room." Meantime, John Berryman, drunk and outrageous as usual, had gone down to the station to get Delmore out, but (perhaps jealous of his notoriety) had instead got himself thrown in, too. We had to persuade Richard Eberhart, a former Navy lieutenant commander, now clad in a business suit, tie and ponderous respectability, to go down and liberate both. One of the more amusing sides of all this was to receive, several weeks later, a letter from Berryman (assuming my ignorance of backstage maneuvers) telling me how *he* had rescued Delmore.

Whether he rescued Delmore or not, Berryman did save the conference, providing its only really creditable moment: the first general public reading of *The Dream Songs*. The audience was electrified; Allen Tate, who did not habitually applaud others' work, shouted "Bravo, John!" Otherwise, the meetings crawled on in disgrace; most of us busied ourselves otherwhere.

I had gone off on a strange project. Back in Detroit, a friend and I had been writing a play about the local John Robert Powers Modeling and Talent Agency where she had been a teacher. In connection with this, we had interviewed a number of people once connected with the school—including a lady who unwittingly told me how she had murdered her husband. I'd had to block all response so completely that the information itself vanished from my mind for several days. Now, in Washington, I decided to try the local Powers School to see what facts might be co-opted for our play.

Two poets from the conference, Anthony Ostroff and Oswald LeWinter (a master of disguise and gentle con games), jumped at the opportunity. We took, for ourselves, names of editors at *The Saturday Evening Post*, looked up the address in the phone book and set off for the beauty school. This, sadly, came to nothing—the school itself, apparently, was so deep in corruption (or at least in debt) that it had closed its doors, and its owners had quietly disappeared. A neighbor

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told us that someone came in the dead of night to collect mail.

Our attempt to con the con artists had fizzled out. Yet there on the street outside the locked beauty school we ran into Oscar Williams, out on a project of his own—a phonograph record of poets reading their own work. I should probably have felt honored that he wanted to include me; what I *did* feel was suspicion. I had made one recording for the Library of Congress which was poorly engineered and on which I had read abominably. I wanted time to find out about the quality of this recording, opportunities to re-record, who else might be involved. And whether anyone I trusted more might be doing a competing record. I thought I had the perfect out; I told Williams I couldn't commit myself until I finished a recording I'd promised for my British publisher. This was true enough, even if *not* the true reason. Apparently satisfied, he invited us all to a party at his hotel suite that evening after the final poetry reading by Robert Frost. Perhaps we could talk about it then, he said; I hoped, foolishly, he might forget about it.

In the meantime, fiercer events were unfolding which suggested that even if we arrived at Frost's reading or Williams's party, none of us might survive to tell our friends or families. Our luncheon with Jacqueline Kennedy that day was suddenly canceled—rumor had it she was in a cave somewhere in a western state. Soviet ships carrying nuclear missiles were steaming toward Cuba; American war ships were steaming toward them. If they met in mid-Atlantic, World War III would almost certainly begin; Washington would be wiped out in hours.

Not surprisingly, this cast a greenish and terminal glow over the remaining meetings and cocktail parties. At one of those, I met for the first and the last time, Robert Frost, eighty-eight and obviously in his last months. We spoke for a few moments but said nothing. He did not mention, and perhaps did not recall, that a few weeks before he had attacked me (though not by name) during his reading in Detroit. Some of my students had asked him about my interpretations of his poems;

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from the platform, he had issued scathing remarks about academics who claimed "Stopping by Woods" had something to do with death or suicide. Two days later, however, he had read the same poem in Ann Arbor, about forty-five miles away, then looked up, startled, at his audience and said, "Well, now, that *does* have a good deal of the ultimate about it, doesn't it?" An Oedipal moment—he had so long misrepresented his own poem that he'd forgotten when and why he wrote it. Yet, like Oedipus, he was capable of piercing his own smoke screen. After that encounter, then his more recent appearance at Kennedy's inauguration, I was naturally curious about what might happen at his reading at the Library that evening, an event with even more of the ultimate about it.

After the cocktail party where the young lady and I had met Frost, we all had to find dinner. Earlier, I'd been approached by a reporter from *Time* who wanted to interview me and suggested we all go out to eat on his expense account. As we piled into a cab, the driver said, "I guess I'll get my uniform out of mothballs." I thought, "You won't have time to change your socks!" But then I decided—already quite drunk, trying to shut out the air of general sleaziness and impending doom—that at least I'd die in *my own* uniform. Stopping the cab, I got out and tore a long vine off the high stone wall of some institute's garden, wove and awarded myself, like Lövborg, a crown of vine leaves.

The cab took us—where else?—to Trader Vic's. Entering, I handed my crown of vines to the hatcheck girl. She never blinked; with a straight pin, she attached a small cardboard number, then set it on the shelf beside the homburgs and military dress caps. In a flower-festooned concrete nook, sitting with a young woman I scarcely knew but with whom I was ostensibly sleeping, I ate coconut-coated shrimp and drank, through two-foot straws, too much hooch from a vast gardenia-decorated bowl—paid for by a magazine I did not respect but whose praise I wanted, via the plastic card held by a man whose name I did not know. Meanwhile, from upstairs, we could hear the voice of John Kennedy saying on television

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that we would soon know whether western civilization might continue. As we left, I fished the gardenias from the empty bowl to pin on the young lady's dress, but forgot to reclaim my crown of vines. Sometimes, when I am back in Washington, I imagine it still sitting forlorn among the fedoras and uniform caps of another generation.

If that had seemed lurid, Robert Frost's reading entirely outdid it. By this time, I was even more drunk and—as with my Powers School interview of years before—did not dare register what was happening until a day or so later. Frost began, as he almost never did, by reading someone else's poem: "Shine, Perishing Republic" by Robinson Jeffers. The title alone might have outraged his audience but they were so preconditioned to reverence that nothing else could reach them. Moving to his own poem, "October," he drew special attention to its relevance for the current autumnal crisis:

> *O hushed October morning mild.*
> The leaves have ripened to the fall;
> Tomorrow's wind if it be wild,
> Should waste them all.

His next poem, "November," developed that figure:

> We saw leaves go to glory, . . .
> And then to end the story
> Get beaten down and pasted
> In one wild day of rain.
> We heard "'Tis over" roaring.
> A year of leaves was wasted.
> Oh, we make a boast of storing,
> Of saving up and of keeping
> But only by ignoring . . .
> By denying and ignoring
> The waste of nations warring.

He said that this was no waste "if it's toward some meaning.

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But you can call it waste, you can call it expense. Just for this evening." Then he added a new line to his own verse:

> By denying and ignoring
> The waste of nations warring
> And the waste of breath deploring.

This was a direct slap at those whose attitude toward the crisis differed from his own. In him, it produced an immediate exhilaration and pugnacity, not against the Russians or Kruschev (whom he called "the greatest ruler in the world, you know, the almighty") but against the liberals, most of his audience. They had often criticized his politics (e.g., his saying that no one should get rid of the poor since he needed them in his work); throughout the evening he kept gibing at their attitudes in general and, specifically, toward this crisis. He spoke of "Dover Beachcombers" and those who "would rather fuss with a Gordian knot than cut it." He went on to say that "every liberal that I know of has a tendency when his enemy works up against him . . . to try to remember if he isn't more in the wrong than the enemy . . . a liberal is a person who can't take his own side in a fight." As the evening went on, he came to be pumping himself up and down at the lectern like a rooster about to crow. Breaking into what seemed a laugh, he referred to that fearful crisis exultantly, "You didn't want to just fade out, did you? Why not go out in a blaze of glory?"

After he had received a standing ovation and everyone started to leave, he returned to the podium and called us all back to hear some inconsequential comment. Again he received a standing ovation and everyone started to leave. And once again, he called everyone back for another empty comment and a third standing ovation.

Meantime, R.P. Blackmur, sitting near me, was growling loud obscenities: "You dirty old bastard! You rotten . . . " I did not understand, though I'd heard Blackmur had never liked Frost. As we surged out of the hall, myself leading the

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young girl by the hand, I heard myself (to my own astonishment) singing loudly an old Scottish ballad:

> She was trantin' and dancin' and singin' for joy;
> She's vowed that very night she would feast Inverey;
> She hae laugh' wi' him, danced wi' him, carried him ben;
> She was kind wi' the villain that had slain her guid man.

I had no notion why either Blackmur or I were behaving so badly. Days later I asked myself why I had been singing *that* song—"The Baron of Brackley." Earlier in the song, Brackley, head of the clan Gordon, had been urged by his wife to ride out and fight against a pack of hired cattle thieves and gallows birds who finally butcher him. Now, triumphing in his death, she spends the night with Inverey, the leader of that gang. Only when I had recreated the song did I realize how betrayed I had felt by Frost's speech and his attitude. Of all the people in that packed hall, only Blackmur had recognized that Frost was not only triumphing over those of his audience he thought over-scrupulous in conflict, but laughing at the probability of that audience's imminent death. Now he would not have to die alone; he had had his full career; they would not. Meantime, they were so worshipful that he could mock them to their faces and receive, in return, not one but three standing ovations.

From Frost's reading, as if it weren't enough, we went to Oscar Williams's suite. There we found Richard Wilbur and sat, literally, at his feet, feeling he was an island of sense and reason in our wide sea of sham and corruption. Before long, though, Williams himself appeared and began badgering me again to commit myself to his recording. I reminded him of my earlier answer—that I must first fulfill my commitment to my British publisher. "Well," he said, getting up, "Mr. Snodgrass is talking through his hat again." This held just enough truth to infuriate me. I followed behind him, saying loudly, "We want our coats; we are going home." To my surprise, he turned suddenly affable, put his arm around me

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and said, "Oh, come now; surely you can take a joke. Come on back and have a drink." Wandering back to Richard Wilbur, happily bemused, I thought I had won. Williams, it seemed, must think me either a very good poet or else very influential to back off from me in his own hotel suite. Very seldom have I been able to summon that kind of immediate aggressive response; apparent success made me quite smug.

A week or so later—back home with my wife and children, the poetry festival and the Cuban crisis safely, I thought, behind me—I found in my mailbox a letter with no return address but postmarked New York City. Inside was a snapshot of the young girl and myself sitting at the feet of Richard Wilbur. The only comment, scribbled on the back, seemed conciliatory, yet there was also a clear, if unspoken, message: *Get frisky, and I can cause you a lot of trouble*. I had wondered, earlier, how Williams convinced so many well-known people to record his wife's turgid poetry; that no longer seemed so mysterious. It did begin to seem that I—a dabbler in corruption, one who liked the look of profligacy—had no business challenging professionals.

Others learned at greater cost. The Hungarian ceramicist, tough and savvy, could take care of herself; she was easily a match for Williams. Rumors said, however, that others close to her, shyer, less wary, more vulnerable, got pregnant and were dumped. Whether that was true or not, and though I scarcely feared *that* sort of conception, I clearly could bring into the world things one wouldn't view with pride; others near me, too, could be damaged. If Dickey and Mailer recognized me, instantly, as *hors de combat*, I had to recognize that I was no match for Williams, either. In any market, the small investor is, by definition, the losing investor.

It seemed a telling coincidence that that conference had been held in Washington, D.C. If people *do* deserve the governments they get—can anyone really be *that* undeserving?—they must also deserve their literary culture. A people unable to produce a society where loyalty might tend downward as well as up, unable to produce a statesman or ruler concerned

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with their welfare, could hardly expect to produce a literary politician more gifted or devoted. Yet many of us thought it needlessly shameful that such a man as Williams should so much define the quality of our literary life—which poets would be read, which acclaimed, which would get awards and grants, which would have a "career." We were sure that "mr. double-u would not be missed" and hoped for the day he would die or be superceded as a power. Naive, learning nothing from the deposal of mr. u., we assumed that after Mr. W., things would *have* to get better.

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Histories of the Undead

Kate Braverman

When Erica took a leave of absence to complete her research she knew almost immediately that she would fail. She devised lists of people to telephone, penciled in a schedule of interviews and columns with questions. Her handwriting seemed small and bruised. She called no one.

She remembers now, in the long mornings when Flora and Bob are gone, that she always detested fragments. Or more accurately, the need to order them, to invent a spine, a progression, a curve that resolves.

She is, at her core, too nervous, restless and cynical. There is something within her that can only say no. It's odd that she had thought she had subdued this, found her own rainforest, slashed and burned it to the last acre of cold ash. She wonders if she should be grateful. Perhaps somewhere on a balcony, in a permanently ochre-tinted city she isn't certain of, there is more air for someone, a woman standing mute and confused in a scented dusk, a woman searching for something.

It was late morning. Day was elbowing clouds above glazed roofs of orange tiles, and she felt startled and amazed. Seen from the right angle, the city was a sequence of seashells,

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glistening abalone, mother-of-pearl. She became aware of the fact that she wasn't worried about abandoning her project or the implications this might have on her tenure profile. She had always sensed a rainy day coming. It would be an afternoon in winter when some massive typhoon would speak her name. There would be a new fluid language, a kind of cursive rendered in acid. Then it would invade her lungs, she would be singed, and it would be the time of the drowning.

It occurred to her that the suddenness with which her behavior altered had a predestined quality. It was as if all her life she had been secretly engaged in a dress rehearsal for precisely this abandonment and divestiture. This knowledge felt perpetual and alluring, like sin or revelation. It was inescapable, a kind of return. It had always been there. This was the cove where she was meant to anchor.

This must be what she was thinking about at traffic lights, why she didn't play her car radio and was never bored, why the static in the air seemed a kind of hieroglyphic she tried to decipher. This must be why she would walk out of theaters and not remember the title of the play, the setting or even the genre. Had it been a musical, a love story or a comedy? She would walk across a parking lot, shaking her head.

Perhaps she had been tuned into another station entirely. There was something on the margin that attracted her, something in the extreme edge of the register where you couldn't be certain of dates or motives or outcome. She could never understand, really, why the motion picture was more interesting than sitting in the lobby with the carpet that looked like a stained glass in reverse, deco blood petals, panels of crimson and lime that marked not translucency but rather the end of the line. Here couples glared at each other above the too yellow popcorn and all things were random, vaguely metallic and swollen. She thought of hooks that were swallowed. And why was this less significant than the other images, the ones you sat in the dark rooms for, sat as if a subliminal force were fattening you for a harvest or a kill.

Erica realized that time would pass and her grant would

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expire. The questions she had planned to examine seemed distant and trivial. She wondered if it were possible to be defined by refusal. Certainly the most brilliant of her subjects would listen to her questions, run a slow hand across a soft mouth and remain silent. She was looking out the kitchen window when she realized this. There were five pigeons on a strip of grass and the red bands around their necks were exactly the same shade of corrupted pink as the red no-stopping lines painted on the curb in front of their house. Had she finally discovered something?

She began to sleep past eight o'clock. She called a taxi cab for her daughter the night before, gave Flora ten dollars, told her to wait outside and keep the change. She reminded Flora not to mention this to Bob. She squeezed Flora's shoulder with her fingers when she said this.

When Erica woke up late, she made a second pot of coffee, put brandy in it, ate an extra piece of toast, layered it with jam. She turned on the stereo. The concept of rock and roll in the morning by sunlight was stunning.

Her husband came home for lunch. She hadn't expected him. She was looking out the kitchen window. There was a tarnish in the air, a sort of glaze. Perhaps part of a complicated cleaning solution with invisible ammonia, it was designed to bring out the shine. But the sky was overcast.

"You seem troubled," Bob said. He put his briefcase on the table. Its proportion seemed monumental. "Is it the research?"

She shook her head, no. It was nearly noon. It was the hour the working men sat on lawns smoking cigarettes and eating lunches that looked too meager to sustain them. They leaned close to one another, planning burglaries and trading lies about women.

"You aren't yourself," Bob decided. He paused and studied her face. "I don't have to go to Seattle. Christ. I don't even have a paper to deliver."

Erica said, "Don't be silly. I'm perfectly fine."

Later, she stood in the backyard where the bushes were trimmed and resembled elongated skulls. She had forgotten

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he was going to a conference. Now that she knew he would be gone this night and the next, she wondered if his absence mattered. Was it fundamental, was it definitive, would there be change? She leaned against the side of the house. These were the stark fragments that bruised, made you fall, made you hoarse. It was best to create methods of walking with your eyes shut.

Bob noticed that she was different, but his conclusion was wrong. He could observe but not interpret. She was merely in transition. She was returning to a version of a former self. And Erica wondered how she would devise a process of clarification, how she would solve this small confusion of who she was.

Whenever she encountered enormities, Erica could only think of walking beside water, a bay or a rocky stretch of coast, or finding her daughter, holding Flora and breathing in the scent of her black hair, which was the spiced essence of night rivers. They were the only two manifestations in the landscape that were indisputable, like a certain sequence of spires, of bridges or plazas. This was how she could know where she was. Geography would form a rudimentary net, the first in a series of coordinates. Later, she could build a landing strip.

Erica walks into the early afternoon, uncertain of where she is going. There is only a sense of fluid depth and the realization that she is again thinking about her sister, Ellen. Her sister has two best friends, and both of them are dying. These two other women, barely nodding acquaintances, have somehow achieved a massive presence in Erica's life. Often her sister will telephone with frantic updates on the brutal unravelings of the other women. It is curious how Lillian and Babette seem more vivid to her than her actual friends.

Erica is given the details of their deterioration, and she absorbs these fragments without effort. They arrange themselves, as if she has an innate capacity for this ordering. She understands these proportions, their facets, how they must be viewed and composed. She envisions Babette, the French skier, frail now, ninety-three pounds. Babette, who never mar-

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ried or had children, who chose instead an intimacy with mountains, a life of suitcases and hotels facing ridges of white, is now confined to a wheelchair.

Erica has memorized the saga of Lillian, shunned by her oncologist, left without a referral for three months, and finally sent to an experimental chemotherapy program. The doctor tells her they expect the treatment to fail.

In the long mornings of waxy stray sunlight across camellias, she finds herself waiting for Ellen to telephone, to recite the most recent conversations, to impart the medical data and the second and third opinions. How Lillian, only a year before the vice president of a stockbrokerage, a woman with two hundred and seventy-five employees, called in the pre-dawn, terrified. They had removed the plug from her arm. They wanted her to get out of bed and into a wheelchair.

"They're dismissing me, and I'm too sick to go home," Lillian realized and wept. "I'm afraid. I keep drifting off."

"What did you do?" Erica asks. She can see part of the street from her living room window. The leaves on the orange trees look artificial, landscaped beyond recognition. They are not trees but someone's concept of how trees should look.

"I tracked down the resident. He said Lillian could die any minute. She doesn't have a month left." Her sister sounds broken. "I told him Lillian lives alone. I said he couldn't send her home alone, not like this."

She pictures Lillian, whom she has only met twice, and cannot clearly remember, as a tall woman with white hair and a straw hat with yellow silk flowers. Now this Lillian is shrunken, ordered into a wheelchair and pushed to the front of a building she cannot recognize. She has no hair, she is too weak to fasten her wig, it's become too complicated. A nurse who barely speaks English, is from the Philippines or Guatemala, deposits the wheelchair at a curb where a taxi attempts to take Lillian to an apartment she cannot provide adequate directions to.

After all, north or south of Wilshire is an immensity of possibility; everything writhes, stung by citrus and pastel.

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Who could draw the line? Lillian knows there are indications. Poinsettias in a cluster might be December. There are lilies at Easter. That comes in April. Of course vegetation is a kind of compass that rises from the ground. There is always a chorus of pigments. This is why we believe in resurrection. And Lillian couldn't get out of a taxi, walk across a lobby, wait for an elevator, open the many locks of the heavy front door she had insisted on. And there's no food there, there hasn't been food in weeks. She just eats through a plug. She can't remember how to turn on appliances or to whom she gave her cat.

Erica wonders if these are parables. Is this what happens to women who dare to live alone, even the good ones, like Lillian, a churchgoer who doesn't sin, ever. Her sister is adamant. Lillian is from the South, for god's sake, she wears gloves and gives money to an organization to protect stray animals.

The air smells scrubbed, polished and detoxed. It is a winter that has been taught a lesson. And Erica doesn't want Flora to be left like this, in some remote time, when she can't be there to protect her, to make sure about release forms, wheelchairs, plugs, the administration of morphine, a bed with a view of the tops of palms.

Suddenly Erica remembers when she decided to murder her daughter. They were living in Northern California. It was the winter it never stopped raining, the coldest and wettest on record. She was going to graduate school, and they didn't know anyone in the county. Erica was still smoking three packs of cigarettes a day. She had bronchitis again. It was her fourth bout of bronchitis that year, and she refused to take a chest X ray. The doctor in the student clinic said she was killing herself, pointed his long white arm at the door, placed her chart on the counter next to her purse, turned back, walked away.

Erica was convinced she had lung cancer. She could sense the blue particles like a glacial stream, trickling and widening. The rain made them grow. They were sensitive to water. Inside her veins she could feel a fluid she imagined was the color of chilled larkspur. She was certain she wouldn't survive this California winter.

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It was before she married Bob. She lay awake listening to the rain and imagined her daughter Flora without her, a four-year-old orphan, a ward of the state. A child to be adopted by foster parents who would sexually abuse her, fail to provide piano lessons and poetry. A child to be raised in apartments where she was the entertainment for the brothers and uncles and the television set was always on.

There was only one possible solution. She would take Flora into her bed, curve into her body, hold her beneath the quilt. They would both take sleeping pills and the winter would be over. But she didn't kill Flora that night, didn't kill herself, and now it is Los Angeles in early February.

Everything feels and tastes like spring. The afternoon dissolves into impressions, phantom images; we give them anchors, we give them language, she thinks. We practice acts of anthropomorphism; we weld the rules of grammar, but they are still creatures, pulsing.

She needs to see Flora. She is nine blocks from her school. It is afternoon and at 2:30 the fourth graders have gym on North Field. Erica can sit behind a clump of oleander and watch her daughter play volleyball near the fence. The day has become simple, transparent. She can either walk along the ocean or watch Flora move through lacquered sunlight. These are the only two indisputable activities in this world.

She walks past an orange tree, then a tree with lemons that look distended and one with tangerines that are a sharp red. They sting the mouth. You bite into them and burn or bleed. You serve such fruit at weddings or wakes. Yesterday she watched Bob pack. He was going to a meeting in Washington. He said she seemed different. "I'm fine. I'm perfectly fine," she had replied.

She remembers saying this to her mother. She had employed exactly the same cadence, the precise rise and fall of her voice. This is a lie she has long ago engraved within herself. This is the way she imagines grown-ups speak. And her mother said, "Don't make me laugh."

"I'm getting myself together," she had told her mother. It

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might have been at the end of graduate school, during her first divorce. It might have been the winter she almost murdered her daughter.

"It's going to take you a lifetime," her mother said. Her mother was drinking vodka. She surveyed her coolly, evaluated her like a suit she didn't consider worth buying. Then she smiled.

Of course, her mother and father are dead now. They are dead but not quite gone. There is an entire substratum of people like this, people she doesn't quite know, and yet they somehow linger. There is the matter of her sister with the two best friends who are dying. There are her daughter's mystery friends that surface and are erased, names she has never heard before suddenly brandished as best friends.

"You know Alexa?" Flora begins. Erica says no. "Alexa, my best friend," Flora continues, highlighting each of her words, obviously annoyed.

This name is not familiar. She feels defensive and afraid. "I know Robin and Claudia," she reminds her daughter. "I know the twins. But not Alexa."

She is combing Flora's hair. It is night. She winds strands into tiny black braids. In the morning, when the braids are undone, Flora will be adorned with vast complexities of curl. Now Flora's head looks like a nest of snakes. We give birth to mythology over and over, Erica realizes, almost trembling with terror. We are the dried riverbeds where they hatch, where they drag their cold bodies across sand. It is from our bellies that they come.

"You're lying," Flora says. "All you do is talk on the phone. You don't even drive me to school anymore." Then she slams her bedroom door.

Now it is important that she find Flora and tell her she wasn't lying. There are protocols for the keeping of names. These syllables are sacred. When the winds have taken everything, even the buildings and the stones and the bark, these names will remain. These are the perpetually open graves. She is going to explain this to her daughter. She will defend herself against this suggestion of desecration.

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Last night, her sister called with more information about Babette. She can no longer sit. She has to sleep strapped to a board, upright, held by buckles. Her bones are turning to a kind of tin. Her sister cannot pronounce the name of the new disease. She can only say that Babette is rusting. She has nightmares filled with liquids, rain: waterfalls, a recurrent beach where she watches the approach of a tidal wave. Ellen has just visited her. She says Babette's skin smells like dust. She creaks when she breathes.

Erica knows both women were misdiagnosed, twice. Somewhere there are four mistakes; someone must be counting. Last night she asked her sister, "Do you ever talk to Lillian about death? About dying?" Erica was lying on her bed. She wanted to know. Bob had not yet gone to Seattle. Erica had shut her bedroom door.

Her sister thought for a moment. "No."

"What do you talk about?" Erica asks.

"Ordinary things," her sister told her. "Who's playing good tennis. Who got a face lift. Whose kid is in jail. The weather, the economy, you know."

Erica does know. When her father was dying, when he was decaying in front of them, inches from their faces and almost in slow motion, it was the one thing no one ever spoke about. Father had the cancer stench. It was a kind of rancid yellow that made her think of tortured fruit and strange rotting cargoes abandoned at sea and something terrible done in rooms with unshaded lightbulbs, abortions, perhaps, or children being photographed naked. Her father's skin became translucent. He was a region of rivers. You could peer inside and see his infinity of blue sins.

Erica wants to ask her sister if she remembers this, but she doesn't. They never speak about their parents or the way they died or what their lives might have meant. Their parents simply disappeared, like a species that vanished overnight. It's as if they never were.

Erica realizes there is an entire ghost substratum inhabiting her. She's become aware of how much time she spends think-

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ing about people she doesn't know and will never know, doesn't even want to meet once. Not just Lillian and Babette, these secondary tragedies she's internalized, not just Flora's profusion of suddenly found and lost best friends, but how she thinks about movie stars and European royalty and the state of their marriages.

She doesn't do this consciously, she would never permit herself to do this consciously. But when she takes her emotional pulse, when she looks directly inside, what she's been thinking about during a three-way traffic light, during a wait in a line at the bank, is Elizabeth Taylor and her new husband, the former carpenter and drug dealer. What do they do together? Do they attend AA meetings? Do they work the twelve-step recovery program? Do they promptly admit mistakes and answer crisis hotlines? She thinks they secretly drink and take drugs. Liz shows him what she has learned about pain pills and champagne. And he initiates her into the sordid avenues of hard-faceted white, the great internal winter, cocaine.

Now, during her leave of absence, when she can take her emotional pulse repeatedly, with concentrated deliberation, she realizes she has been colonized by the insubstantial—something leaking, broken and generic out of a self-destructing culture. A kind of collective virus.

She used to think about Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath. That was when she lived with painters, when she lived in lofts above Indian restaurants, and afternoons smelled of curry, the sun set in a sequence of saffrons, she thought the bungalows behind hedges of sunflowers along the Venice canals were holy, and her parents were not yet dead.

She didn't try to imagine Sylvia Plath and her husband in bed. She didn't envision Virginia wrapped in the arms of a woman, rain falling, and what they might have done with their mouths. She visualized instead the kitchens where they brewed tea, the patterns of painted pink rosebuds on the cups and the way the wind sounded as if it had just been eating ships. But the graphic couplings she now considers, the intricacies of bodies and proclivities, this she has saved for television stars.

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It is 1:30, and she is four blocks from Flora's school. She can sense that Lillian is going into a coma. That's what she was afraid of when she telephoned Ellen and wept, "Don't let them send me home. I feel like I'm drifting in and out."

Erica closes her eyes, and there are acres of faces within her. She is even replete with the spouses of men she barely knows. How many afternoons had she imagined her lawyer's wife. She did this for months during her first divorce, staring at the photograph on his desk. A blond woman with ice skates hung over her right shoulder. A woman wearing a green wool sweater and sunglasses. She was often tempted to ask her name. She finally decided it was Ingrid or Justine. She was good with dogs and gardens, never got migraines, enjoyed baking.

It occurs to Erica that what she wants to research is not history as it actually is or was but some more fragile peripheral version, in its own way, filled with untamed ambiguity. It would be a history of the undead, the flickering partials and the almost.

In these regions of ambivalence are the men she almost married. Erica has reconstructed pieces of their lives, a conversation, a newspaper clipping, an accidental sighting, something overheard. She might have stayed with Derek in Maui. Or the photographer in Spain. There are the lingering pulsings of her former selves, standing on balconies of apartments and villas, watering geraniums, wearing a white slip above cobblestone alleys, above a plaza or a bay.

Jason, telephoning her at the university two years ago. She was working late. He was drunk. "I'm drinking fifteen-year-old scotch and it's been fifteen years since I fucked you. Come over."

Erica looked out her office window, noted the low soiled mountains and considered it. It was August in Southern California, and everything seemed burned, even at night. It was the time of the avenues of scorch and the unraveling of an indelible yellow.

She could reach into the substrata of the barely known, make a date, meet in a motel in Long Beach, maybe, or Van

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Nuys. It would have to be an urban suburb where no landscape could intrude, where it wouldn't be about beaches and palm trees, but California as it really was—back roads the color of mustard, smelling of onions and vinegar below hills where nothing could grow. In a valley of brush and sage and sand they could know the real nature of their hearts. It wasn't the stuff of postcards. But they knew this already. That's why she hung up.

We carry the undead with us, she thinks. That's why it's so hard to walk, why her boots hurt and the sun sears. She still packs for Jason, still takes him to Hawaii and London with her. She stands at her closet, one closet or another, hearing him say, only red or black. You're a Toulouse-Lautrec whore. Anything else on your skin is an atrocity. And she finds herself repeatedly choosing these colors, in nightgowns and coats, tablecloths and socks.

Maybe she will tell her colleagues it is the history of the partial she wishes to explore, the terrain without specific intentions or borders. This is what she is thinking as she approaches Flora's school, as she sits on a lawn next to a rock with a bronze plaque nailed to it. "Dedicated to Maurice J. Finelander, 1918–1964." What did that forty-six-year-old man die from? Did he suffer, turn translucent, did he drift, could you look inside his chest and chart the avenues of his disgrace?

After she sees Flora, she will go home and wait for her sister to call. Afternoons are punctuated with desperate news about Lillian. Sometimes Erica telephones first. She has never called her sister so often, not even when their mother had a heart attack. They haven't spoken this often since they shared a room in the summer house.

"What's the latest with Lillian?" she will ask. Her eyes will be abnormally wide, she will take big breaths, as if there is some quality in the late afternoon wind that she needs.

Perhaps it has something to do with the enormous subterranean architecture she is discovering with its roots, shadows and branching networks. This is beneath her feet all the time. This is what children sense under the bed. This is the secret

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structure of the world, and children feel this hidden spine. This is why they need stuffed pandas and teddy bears. This is why she is walking to the school to find her daughter, to tell Flora she would never lie about the names of the almost known.

Suddenly, Erica recognizes a complexity that makes her decide to turn back. She wants to tell Flora that certain fragments seem like lies but they are not. It is simply the other world with its decaying possibilities casting luminous debris. It is not deliberate. There is no malice. But names get lost here. They are like seashells washed up on a wide night shore in a season of not enough moon. Inside each shell is a name, and the sea speaks it clearly, says *Alexa*, *Flora*, *Lillian*. But there are winds, the intrusion of partially forgotten winters that in memory are a stark and insinuating blue. And Erica realizes that she cannot tell this to Flora. This is a stretch of beach you must find for yourself and then only in a drowning season.

Erica walks home on a boulevard where the sidewalk is planted with rose bushes, bird of paradise and iris, and she is thinking about events in the subterranean world. Here are the traffic accidents we almost had, but didn't. Here are the planes we missed that might have carried bombs on them. Do the almosts form an architecture? Is that how you navigate in the cities of the undead?

Later that week, her sister calls, desperate. Lillian has run away. She's had a paranoid seizure, perhaps from the drugs. Or maybe the cancer has metastasized into her brain. No one knows. She just took her raincoat and wallet and disappeared from the hospital. Her neighbor saw her get out of a cab. Lillian explained that she had come back for her cat.

"What should I do?" her sister asks.

She imagines her sister holding the phone, pacing, staring out the balcony. The wind has been blowing, a Santa Ana from the desert. Everything seems a form of fleshy yellow. It is a night of skin. Lamps are insignificant. The moon is so inordinately bright she thinks the savanna must have been like this, rocked by streaks of yellow with the intensity of seduction and prophecy.

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"We'll drive the streets and find her," Erica decides. "I'll pick you up."

Flora has suddenly appeared. She is always barefoot, soundless. She simply materializes. She is holding her math book open at her hip. Flora could survive in the night, with her head of uncoiling snakes. She seems to be waiting for something. Erica knows what her daughter is doing. Flora is stalking.

Bob has returned from his conference in Seattle. He is staring at her, watching her assemble car keys, wallet, jacket. He studies the objects she is sliding into her pockets as if he plans to collect evidence. He is standing in front of the living room door as if he intends to guard it.

Earlier, when she was cooking dinner, Bob had asked if she had gone to the library. He had telephoned, and she wasn't home. She said no. She stared at the cheese she was cutting. She examined the tip of the knife. Her husband didn't understand that she was never going back to the library. It doesn't contain the artifacts she needs. Then he asked what she had done all day.

"I don't remember," she said. She was holding a knife. It felt hard in her hand. She put it down. She could feel the moon through the window. It occurred to her that there was no history, only the etiology of yellow.

Now Bob says, "Where are you going?"

There is always this moment, she realizes. The where and the why. The demand for coordinates and specifics, the number of acres, who saw the troops, which direction and how many. There is always this and the way sometimes you don't answer.

"It's Lillian," she says, walking quickly toward the door. He is heavier but has trouble with his knees. She could outflank him if she had to. "She's roaming the streets. She's lost her mind."

Erica considers the invisible artifacts she has recently unearthed. She thinks about mapping the subterranean stratum. What sort of tools would she need, what form of illumination?

"But you don't even know that woman," her husband says.

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"I do know her," Erica replies. "I've never known anyone so well."

Flora is staring at her. They look into one another's eyes, and Erica realizes communication is dimensional, like something knitted, a rope or a net. Then she is walking into the yellowed night, where the wind sounds like a rushing river; there is a lashing of branches, and the leaves are clinging to stay on.

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Portfolio

Silverprints

James Casebere

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"Venice Ghetto"

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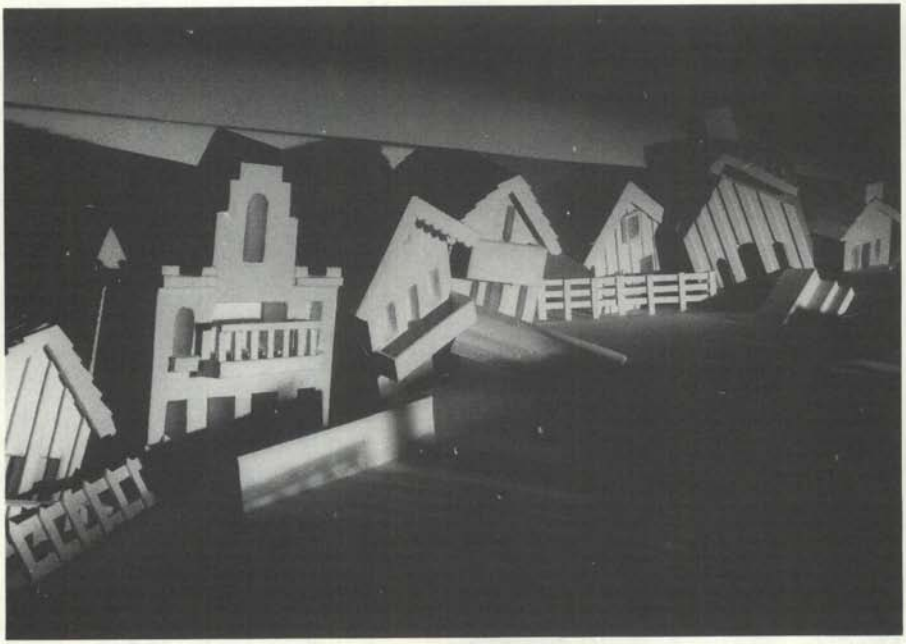

"Portuguese Beachfront"

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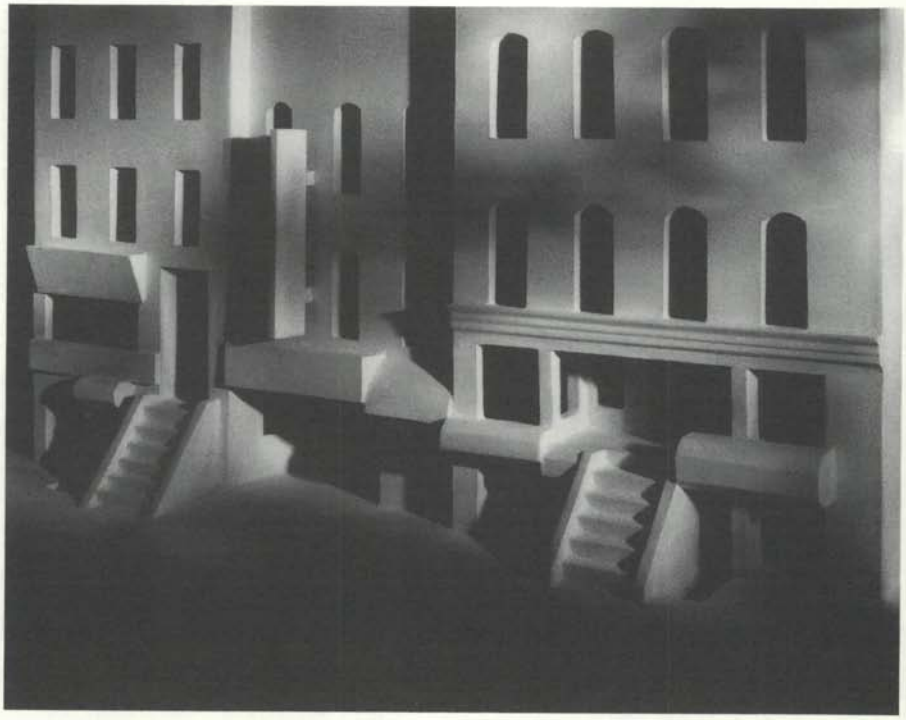

"Tenement"

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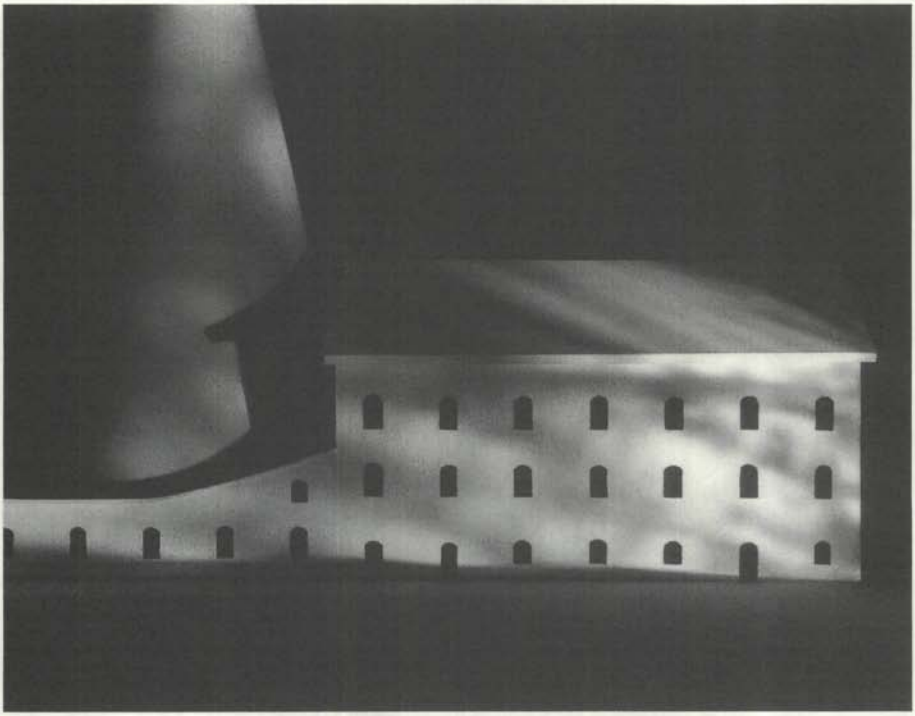

"Industry"

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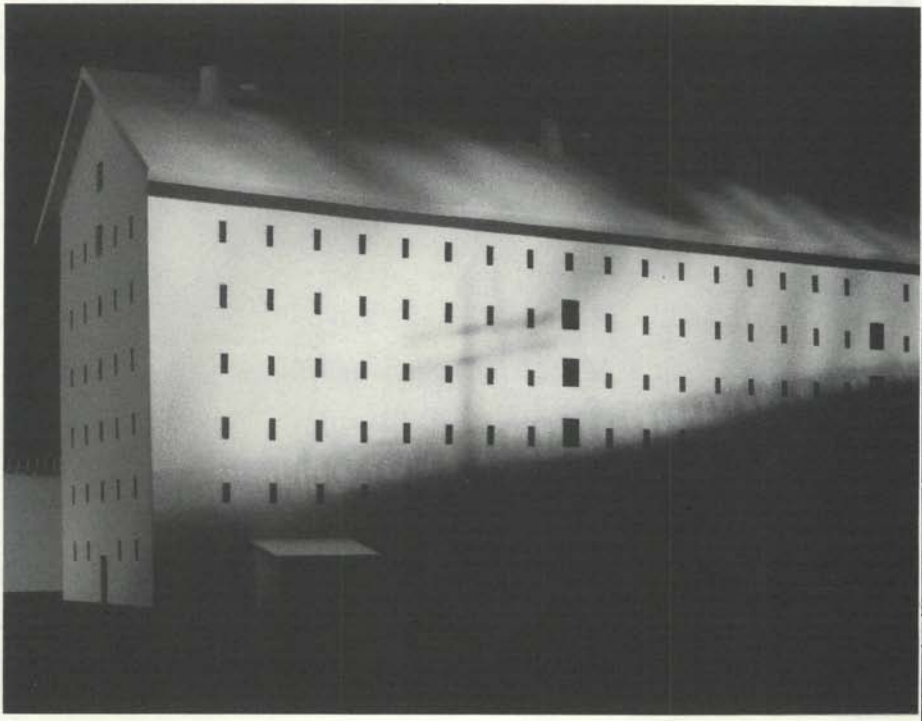

"Sing Sing 2"

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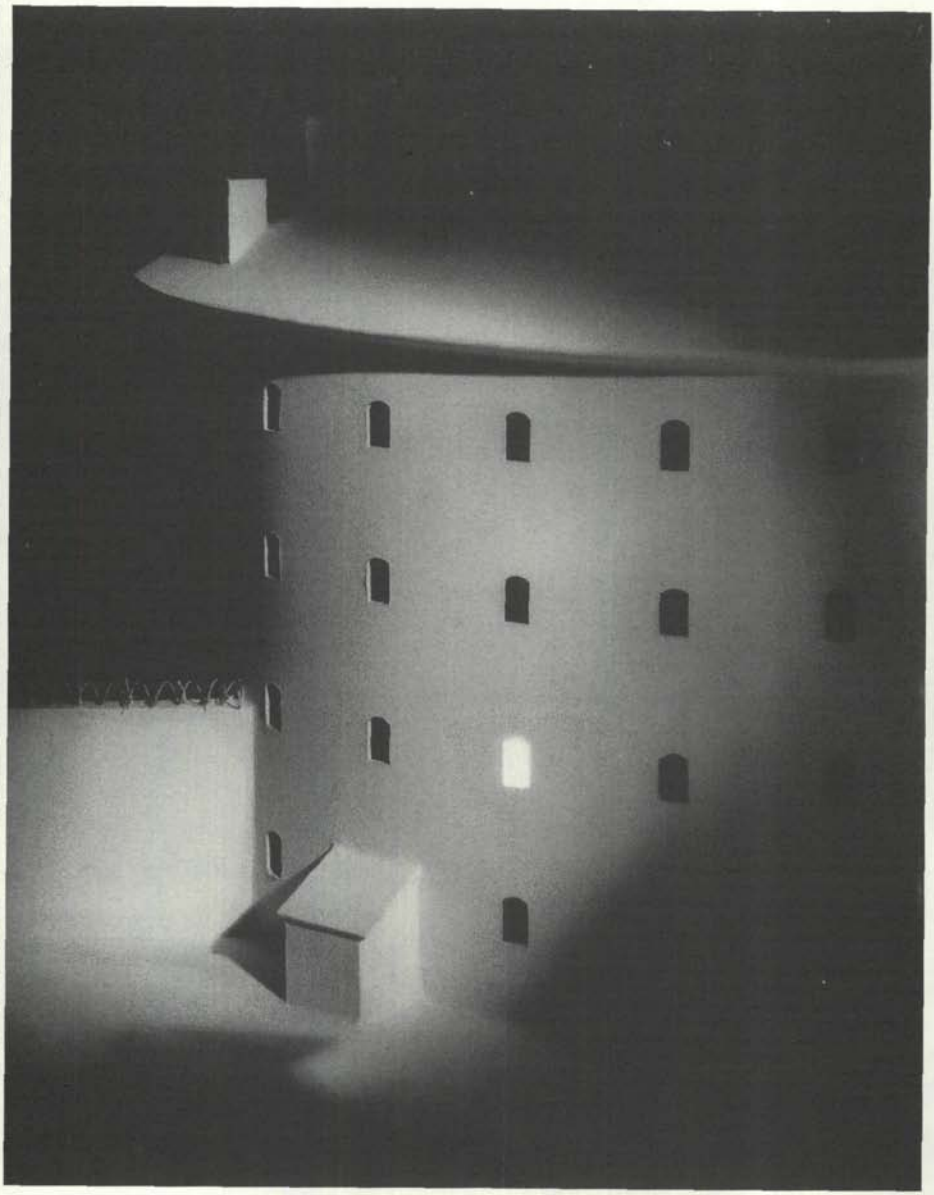

"Panopticon Prison 3"

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Tomas Tranströmer

La Lugubre Gondola No. 2

I

Two old men, father-in-law and son-in-law, Liszt and Wagner,
are staying by Canal Grande
together with the agitated woman who is married to King Midas
the one who transforms everything he touches to Wagner.
The green cold of the sea penetrates through the floors of
the palace.
Wagner is a marked man, the well known Punch profile is more
frayed than ever,
his face is a white flag.
The gondola is loaded down with their lives, two
round trips and one one-way.

II

A window flies open in the palace and someone is making faces
in the sudden draught.
Outside on the water, the garabage gondola appears paddled by
two one-oared bandits.
Liszt has written a few accords that are so heavy that they ought
to be sent
to the mineralogical institute in Padua for analysis.
Meteorites!
Too heavy to rest, they can only sink and sink through
the future all the way down
to the years of the brownshirts.
The gondola is loaded down with the cowering stones
of the future.

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III

Embrasures toward 1990.

25th of March. Worry about Lithuania.
Dreamt that I visited a large hospital.
No staff. They were all patients.

In the same dream, a newborn girl
who was talking in complete sentences.

IV

Next to his son-in-law, who is a man of his time, Liszt is a moth-eaten Grand Seigneur.
It is a disguise.
The deep that tries out different masks has chosen precisely this one for him—
the deep that wants to approach us humans without showing its face.

V

Abbé Liszt is used to carrying his own suitcase through slush and sunshine
and when he is finally about to die there is nobody meeting him at the station.
A temperate breeze of a highly gifted brandy carries him off in the midst of an assignment
He always has assignments
Two thousand letters a year!
The schoolboy who must write the misspelled word a hundred times before he is allowed to go home.
The gondola is loaded down with life, it is simple and black.

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VI

Back to 1990.

Dreamt that I drove two hundred kilometers in vain.
Then everything was magnified. Sparrows the size of hens
their song a deafening din in my ears.

Dreamt that I had drawn piano keys
on the kitchen table. I played on them, mutely.
The neighbors came in to listen.

VII

The keyboard which has kept silent through the entire Parsifal
(but it has listened) is at last allowed to say something.
Sighs . . . sospiri . . .
When Liszt is playing tonight he will hold down the sea pedal
so that the green power of the sea will rise through the floor
merge with all the stones in the building.
Good evening, beautiful deep!
The gondola is loaded down with life, it is simple and black.

VIII

Dreamt that I was to start school but came late.
All those in the room were wearing white face masks.
Who the teacher was, was impossible to tell.

—translated from the Swedish
by Joanna Bankier

NOTE: At the turn of the year 1887–1888, Liszt visited his daughter, Cosima, and her husband, Richard Wagner in Venice. A few months later Wagner died. Liszt's two piano pieces entitled "La Lugubre Gondola No. 1" and "La Lugubre Gondola No. 2" were composed at the time. *—T.T.*

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Sarah Arvio

Hello Goodbye

I

A sub- or super-sensibility,
exquisitely fine-tuned, can summon up
special information, specially told:
those liminal messages and meanings
that never seem to flow from memory
or from the usual notion of thought:
a sound that buds in the captive silence
with a distinctive spin or emphasis
heard like a signature or fingerprint;
a name and greeting that coyly unfurl
and then a conjury of uncurling words
with the smooth imperative of whispers
sprouting in a room that just went still;
which say how dear you are to him who speaks,
and darling, what has closed your ears till now?
A voice, then another, unfolding, which say,
with the benefit of all our brilliance,
together with you, what we couldn't do,
which say, one will love you, one will not,
which say, we've watched you from the other side
of many mirrors where you've watched yourself
—words that overlap and lift and lull,
lush and variable as waves or leaves,
rich with random disembodied love,
a laugh, a lure, a vow, an incantation,
and yes, from this deep cup we drink to you:
No voice is ever new, and ours is yours.
All watery gardens we were dreamers in.

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II

But there are dangers to these interviews,
which require a fertile openness
and a naive impressibility:
one caller who ingratiates himself
by stem and root in the course of days,
who traps you in the texture of his voice,
wraps you in its ramifying patterns,
whose animating idea is subversion—
who swells you with delusions of genius,
chats you up, claws down the competition,
counsels against incarnate visitors,
claims a sea of visionary power
to read your future lover's unsprung thoughts;
goads you into arcane entanglements,
ornate parks, small, symbolic and sapless,
demanding that his weedy, high-strung voice,
his barren prophecies, dress up your page.
Proved wrong, he hilariously scribbles
and loops on the waves of air, and shouts "no!"
an instant before the cup slips, shatters.
All for the primal pleasure of cruelty,
or a vengeance grafted from another time,
or a rootless impulse, aimed at random?
What then? Succumb to his charms and refusals,
held by the dark drift of loneliness,
by the mere habit of his company;
or brazen your way past this shrill intruder
in search of a milder, truer influence;
or stop conversing with the other side,
wishing all their babble would dwindle away
and leave you to a peaceful emptiness,
a silent place, white and self-embracing?
Though long after you hope you've plucked them out,
those rustling whispers lap into your dreams
or nudge your fingers when you lift a pen:
No voice is ever new, but yours is ours.
All drowning forests we were dreamers in.

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Tony Sanders

After Berenice Abbott

I. Trinity at Noon

Although it is noon or roughly so, the church below is
positioned like an hour hand
at eleven o'clock,
with its spire rising up in shadow as if the photographer
wanted to relocate religions
in another time.
People on either side of the street at lunch hour run
together like long lines of music
in a hymnal.
Nobody will ever know for sure why she chose the high
floor she did to look down
on humanity,
or why she let the anonymous, dark windows of an office
building across the street
be so dominant.
Nobody will ever know for sure why she chose the high
floor she did to look down
on the cemetery
with the headstones facing forward as one might find in a
cathedral barely half-full
at high mass.

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II. Fulton and Pearl

The rolled-up awning under the fire escape reads Hat
Cleaning & Shoe Shine Parlor
in gray letters,
but the awning sags over the E and S of Joe's in the glass
above a man alone inside
without a hat.
Joes Shoe & Hat Cleaning Parlor it says in letters with
black borders in the window
without the man.
It says Joe's Shoe and Hat Cleaning in white letters in
three rows on a cement pillar
next to the door.
A white straw hat painted on a thin pane about eye level
reads in small print Cleaned
While You Wait.
Shoe Shine Parlor it says behind a feather duster by the
daily newspapers and a box
of pale apples,
while a vendor stands in front of Joe's Shoe & Hat wearing
a shabby change apron
and a clean hat.

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III. Exchange Place

She could have clambered to the top of a skyscraper and
photographed the sidewalk
at lunch hour,
at a time when the narrow way would have been full of
moneymen elbow to elbow
in blocked hats.
She could have kept at street level and focused in on the
conspiracy of the buildings
to keep out sky,
so that few of the pedestrians ever took their eyes off
newspapers or glanced higher
than wing tips.
It wasn't buildings or brokers in broadcloth that drew her
to the far end of the street
several flights up,
nor was it an intricate cornice she wanted when she
cropped most of the architecture
out of the picture.
It was how that long, slim corridor of commerce was
designed to open only slightly
like a new wallet.

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IV. Peerless Equipment Co.

A man whose face is blurred sits with his feet on a barrel
puffing a cigar and staring
at wheels of rope.
Not just rope, but Manila hemp made from the fiber of
the abaca a.k.a. *Musa textilis*
whose leafstalks
very much resemble those of the banana tree though fruit
is not what comes to mind
given a room
with a small potbelly stove in the center encroached upon
by columns of sea rigging
that reach up
to the anchors several of which resemble meat hooks as
they dangle from the ceiling
by the preservers.
Not just anchors, but the sacred anchor, and the screw
anchor, and the stern anchor
and the kedge,
as if being aboard a tug by Manhattan or a freighter in the
South Pacific is both holy
and crude.

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V. Minetta Street, Nos. 2, 4, 6: 1935

Where once the trout stream called Minetta Brook worked
its way through farmland
in Manhattan
until the beginning of the eighteenth century now stand
three dreary, brick buildings
like immigrants
who having lived long and difficult lives without ever
learning the English language
age together.
Two of them have elevated entrances with stone stairways
and rickety black railings
used so much
the center of each step is as deeply eroded as a butcher-
block table after two decades
with one butcher.
The difference is these buildings have been inhabited by
everybody from ragpickers
to the old man
at the left negotiating stairs with the deliberation of
somebody who knows next year
he must go too.

(All three buildings were demolished in 1936.)

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Michael Benedikt

Of Granny Smith's Apples; or, of the Revolutionizing of Life in Small but Efficacious Ways

Dedicated to Granny Smith, inventor of the Granny Smith-type apple.

You must revolutionize your life.
—old, recurring radical slogan

1

Sometimes, even when it feels necessary, it's hard to improve
upon, much less "Revolutionize Your Life"—as some
people, somewhat grandiosely, tend to phrase it;
But at least—if we begin with some relatively small things—
it may be possible, I believe,
To make Things Just A Little Bit Better

—For example, take eating Apples! Obviously, there is that
exact possibility of Improvement, with respect to eating
Apples! For example: lots of people believe, it would seem,
that the Apples they are fed
Should always be colored Red. It's easy to remember, I guess,
that Apples, in general, are usually colored Red:

—I suppose what most people have there, somewhere, in the
backs of their minds
Are Apples like the famous one given to Snow White, by
the Witch (even though that Apple was obviously a totally
deplorable Apple, & is said to have made her fall asleep
for years & years);

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& Then there is the historically far more famous, & rather
more attractive Apple supposedly given to Adam, by Eve
(the Eden-Apple, that is, the Apple alas—or else maybe
unAlas?—
Of Too Much Knowledge). They were both Red, weren't
they?

& Yet there is, of course, another kind of Apple, & another
color of Apple, that isn't Red at all

—It's known in America, where it was first grown, as the
"Granny Smith" variety; &, whoever Granny Smith was,
or is, her Apples have certain obvious advantages, I think,
Which can easily be discovered, beyond the obvious Red!

2

First of all: Apples of the Granny Smith-type last longer than
the Red type. The implications of that are actually quite
tremendous, I think!

—For example, whenever you walk into your local fruit-store
You're not likely to be met, at the "Granny Smith" bin—nope,
not on your life!—by a vast mass of purportedly "fresh," and
in any case always flashily Red Apples doubtless picked just
a few days before that,
But which upon closer inspection (when you pick them up
& hold them up to the light, so as to look for any of those
suspicious, semi-invisible brown spots), will too often reveal
May already be well on the way to becoming one-quarter, or
even fully half-rotten—so that if, for example, you happen
to be on your way to work, & happen to be desperate to
buy your apple a day then & there, right away,
Finally you gotta *squeeze* the damn things, feeling around
between those possibly rotten spots
To see if they are still what they seem; & are still really firm;
& (yuk!) without a wayward worm;

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3

—& So, sometimes, despite all your valiant efforts to find a perfect Apple, it's easy to end up hurriedly grabbing virtually any Apple, eating it, sooner or later
Around the possibly rotten spots, uncovering minor pockets of brown graininess with every bite-full (yuk! & double-yuk!).

4

Nope! Not on your life!—there's none of that kind of thing with the "Granny Smith"-type Apple!

—For even though they're not flaming show-offs, uniformly jacketed in peels of vividly radical Red.
But rather, in color, are, just before ripening, a kind of cool, even skeptical, acid-green, later turning a kind of Mellow Gold
& Have got, of all pleasantly surprising things, tiny little speckles all over their jackets (which to my mind, at least, suggests merriment; & jolly, albeit miniscule, polka dots)

How they *do* gratify the taste buds, tongue, & teeth; & oh, how (unlike the kind which are aggressively Red)
They please, oh yes how they genuinely please
Not just the body, but also the enquiring mind!

—Partly, because with a Granny Smith-type Apple, just as with any good Idea that's firm & solid, & likely to prove valid,
You know what you're getting into beforehand, before you buy it!

5

So, if you're looking for a nice way to change, if not exactly "Revolutionize" your life, in small, & modestly conservative, but definitely efficacious ways

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—Particularly, without worrying for example about
accidentally semi-poisoning yourself, or otherwise lousing
up your vital, Apple-eating experience—

Try for once, I'd suggest (especially if you haven't tried them
ever!), Granny Smith's Apples! After all

Even *beyond* beginning to change your life in small, & sensibly
perspicacious ways (instead of filling your mouth & maybe
your entire head, in effect,
With a lot of quasi-rotten tastes & vague unflavors which
always remind me, for one, of feelings which smack
of Bad Ideas)

—Yes even *beyond* that, wouldn't you like, too

To help perpetuate the memory of an ingenious, highly
original, yet obviously also completely down-to-earth
old lady Who was probably also—I'll bet you dollars to
doughnuts!—

A nice, tasteful, forward-looking & also All-Around Good
Person?

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Rick Adang

Letter from Kitty Dukakis: Between the Election and the Breakdown

They called it a landslide as though
everything shifted and the weak
and strong alike were buried alive.
Not true. We simply came home.
Mike mows the grass and when he wheels it
into the garage, laughs. Probably
thinking of that goddamn tank.

I don't forget any of the faces.
Wet palms, bad breath, large mouths.
We didn't work the crowds so much
as they worked us. Mike would say
"this is the real America."
Mike's always been the sincere type.

Mike reads the postmortems and ponders
a rematch. I draw the shades.
The lights seem harsher these days,
moonlight not what it used to be.

Somewhere in Iowa I dropped an earring.
Haven't felt quite dressed since.
I spend too much time in bed

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where I'm always properly dressed, propped up
with a dozen pillows. Mike waves
through the window and pitches
against the siding. No longer concerned
with camera angle, he's getting a bit more
velocity into his curveball. I'm the roar
of the crowd as he brings the hummer in
for strike three.

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Laurel Blossom

Baboon Liver Transplant Poem

By this time, his wife has certainly left him, his kids
have kids of their own. Nobody can tell him where
he picked up the virus; in Mombasa it's easy
to get whatever you want. The point is
he finally gets so sick he needs a new liver.
You know how great the demand is worldwide.

Fortunately, the Americans are looking, worldwide,
for someone to try out this brand-new technique his
grandkids
have heard about on TV: Grampa, what's a baboon liver
transplant? He draws them a picture where
the baboon attacks him on the highway and it looks like
Grampa's
a goner, easy—

but he's so tough he survives. He makes it look easy.
Like Bobbie, for instance, on worldwide
TV, dreaming the entire prior season of *Dallas*. So here's
our Lazarus, in critical condition, kidneys
functioning, heart okay, awake and able to indicate where
it hurts. In the liver

that is, after all, not his liver
but belongs to that same monkey or his brother who, easy
as pie, ate his larynx out. He's learned where
not to look a gift horse. So to speak. Meanwhile, wide-
angle,
they show on TV a troop of baboons with their scrambling
kids
walking into a sunset so red it's

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an editorial comment, while the surgeon intones: "This
man is
a hero. If we can make a baboon-for-human liver
transplant work, thousands of people, including a lot of
kids,

could be saved." The whole thing makes the viewer un-
easy.
The story, of course, gets worldwide
coverage. Outside the University Hospital where

the operation takes place and where
an angry crowd is shouting, "Animals are not spare parts,"
there's
a parking lot. It is two blocks wide.
Women walk by in fur coats. Liver
is on the cafeteria menu. After a month of relatively easy
recovery, the patient has a massive stroke and dies. No
kids

saved this week. Where the American people stand on
baboon liver
transplants isn't clear. The death of an innocent victim
isn't easy.
On the other hand, there's widespread opposition in this
country to treating the whole blessed world with
kid gloves.

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Five Poems by Molly Peacock

My College Sex Group

All my girlfriends were talking about sex
and the vibrators they ordered from "Eve's
Garden" which came with genital portraits
of twelve different girls. All my friends' needs
swirled around me while their conversations
about positions crescendoed and they waved
their vibrators—black rubber things. Saved
by volubility I looked at the relations
of labia to clitorides—look, there was one
like mine, labia like chicken wattles
below a hooded clitoris. "Friends!
of these twelve genital portraits, which
are you?" I couldn't ask them. Happy
to have found a picture of one like me:
the portrait held the hair all back and popped
the clitoris out like a snapdragon
above the dark vaginal stem.
Oh God, it was me! (and another, I stopped,
there were others like us, throughout the world.)
When my order for the vibrator was filled,
I'd get my own portrait. I'd show it to the next boy
before I got undressed, "Here's what you're getting."
And I'm not alone, or ugly, if that's what you're thinking.

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The Return

When I open my legs to let you seek,
seek inside me, seeking more, I think
"What are you looking for?" and feel it will
be hid from me, whatever it is, still,
or rapidly moving beyond my frequency.
Then I declare you a mystery,
and stop myself from moving and hold still
until you can find your orgasm. Peak
is partly what you look for, and the brink
you love to come to and return to must
be part of it, too, thrust, build, the trust
that brings me, surprised, to a brink of my own . . .
I must be blind to something of my own
you recognize and look for. A diamond
speaks in a way through its beams, though it's dumb
to the brilliance it refracts. A gem at the back
of my cave must tell you, "Yes, you can go back."

The Rule

Completely naked, mons completely gray,
my mother tells me how to masturbate
leaning over the couch where down I lay
in my dream. But I know how! You're too late!
Too often we have to wait for our guides.
Completely naked, mons completely brown,
will I invite her to lie down, who prides
herself on never touching, let alone
holding, stroking, licking? I don't,
though if I wait perhaps she will come of
her own powers, and then we will make love.
Will we be guilty, taking our love loaned
from a dream? Or will curiosity
free us from "Be Still," and let us be?

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Have You Ever Faked an Orgasm?

When I get nervous, it's so hard not to.
When I'm expected to come in something
other than my ordinary way, to
take pleasure in the new way, lost, not knowing

how to drive it back to sureness . . . where are
the thousand thousand flowers I always pass?
the violet flannel, then the sharpness?
I can't, I can't . . . extinguish the star

in a burst. It goes on glowing. Your head
between my legs so long. Do you really
want to be there? I whimper as though . . . silly . . .
then get mad. I could smash your valiant head.

"You didn't come, did you?" Naturally, you know.
Although I try to lie, the truth escapes me
almost like an orgasm itself. Then the "No"
that should crack a world, but doesn't, slips free.

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I Consider the Possibility

Long waisted, tender skinned and, despite the gym,
love roll about the midriff above the leggy limbs
muscled into knots at each calf, "beautiful for your age,"
—bend over naked from your waist and show your red half
peach of cunt to me who has fumbled at my cage
trying key after key in the stuck door with a half laugh
after each failure, let me lay the bone of my nose
on the peach flesh and lift up my mouth to the pit
as I reach my arms toward the inverted throes
of your breasts, and as I touch your orange nipple tips
know that I have striven all my life toward men
and now, marriageless again, gossiping with my mother
who bluntly suggests that there are always women
and upon being merrily teased by my therapist
at the prospect of our love affair (thinking that "the other"
has never incited such laughter) let me touch your wrist
at the dinner table, and begin the silly maneuver
that will lead me to hold your head, to smooth your
hair all back, as going through keys at the door my own wrist
finally turns tender side up as the lock untwists.

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Dharma

Vikram Chandra

Ramani had been to Bandra that day, and he was talking about a bungalow on the seafront. It was one of those old three-storied houses with balconies that ran all the way around, set in the middle of a garden filled with palms and fish ponds. It sat stubbornly in the middle of towering apartment buildings, and it had been empty as far back as anyone could remember, and so of course the story that explained this waste of golden real estate was one of ghosts and screams in the night.

"They say it's unsellable." said Ramani. "They say a Gujarati seth bought it and died within the month. Nobody'll buy it. Bad place."

Zulfikar Ali, who had retired as a senior physicist at the Atomic Energy Commission, said decisively, "These are all family property disputes. The cases drag on for years and years in courts, and the houses lie vacant because no one will let anyone else live in them."

I was remembering the pleasant midnight chill of telling tales in the dark. It was so long ago. "I prefer the ghost version,"

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I said. I'd had three excellent gin slings and was feeling lazy and sad. "I prefer to believe in ghosts."

"I've never met one," Zulfikar Ali said. "And so I can't."

"It's true," Subramaniam said suddenly. He was sitting in his corner, and his voice was barely a whisper, but we all heard it. "Some people meet their ghosts, and some don't. But we're all haunted by them."

I laughed with delight, because I knew I was going to get what I wanted. I waved my arm for another drink and settled back into my chair. It was dark already, and when I laid my head back against the wood I was very comfortable. "What do you mean?" I said, not too loudly.

"Listen," Subramaniam said.

On the day that Major General Jago Antia turned fifty, his missing leg began to ache. He had been told by the doctors about phantom pain, but the leg had been gone for twenty years without a twinge, and so when he felt a twisting ache two inches under his plastic knee, he stumbled not out of agony but surprise. It was only a little stumble, but the officers who surrounded him turned away out of sympathy, because he was Jago Antia, and he never stumbled. The younger lieutenants flushed with emotion, because they knew for certain that Jago Antia was invincible, and this little lapse, and the way he recovered himself, how he came back to his ramrod straightness, this reminded them of the metallic density of his discipline, which you could see in his gray eyes. He was famous for his stare, for the cold blackness of his anger, for his tactical skill and his ability to read ground, his whole career from the gold medal at Khadakvasla to the combat and medals in Leh and NEFA. He was famous for all this, but the leg was the center of the legend, and there was something terrible about it, about the story, and so it was never talked about. He drove himself across jungle terrain and shamed men twenty years younger, and it was as if the leg had never been lost. This is why his politeness, his fastidiousness, the delicate way he handled his fork and knife, his slow smile, all these Jago

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quirks were imitated by even the cadets at the academy: they wished for his certainty, and believed that his loneliness was the mark of his genius.

So when he left the bara khana his men looked after him with reverence, and curiously the lapse made them believe in his strength all the more. They had done the party to mark an obscure regimental battle day from half a century before, because he would never have allowed a celebration for himself. After he left they lolled on sofas, sipping from their drinks, and told stories about him. His name was Jehangir Antia, but for thirty years, in their stories, he had been Jago Antia. Some of them didn't know his real name.

Meanwhile, Jago Antia lay on his bed under a mosquito net, his arms flat by his sides, his one leg out as if at attention, the other standing by the bed, and waited for his dream to take him. Every night he thought of falling endlessly through the night, slipping through the cold air, and then somewhere it became a dream, and he was asleep, still falling. He had been doing it for as long as he could remember, long before para school and long before the drop at Sylhet, towards the hostile guns and the treacherous ground. It had been with him from long ago, this leap, and he knew where it took him, but this night a pain grew in that part of him that he no longer had, and he tried to fight it away, imagining the rush of air against his neck, the flapping of his clothes, the complete darkness, but it was no use. He was still awake. When he raised his left hand and uncovered the luminous dial it was oh-four-hundred, and then he gave up and strapped his leg on. He went into the study and spread out some maps and began to work on operational orders. The contour maps were covered with markers, and his mind moved easily among the mountains, seeing the units, the routes of supply, the staging areas. They were fighting an insurgency, and he knew of course that he was doing good work, that his concentration was keen, but he knew he would be tired the next day, and this annoyed him. When he found himself kneading his plastic shin with one hand, he was so angry that he went out on the porch and

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puffed out a hundred quick push-ups, and in the morning his puzzled batman found him striding up and down the garden walk as the sun came up behind a gaunt ridge.

"What are you doing out here?" Thapa said. Jago Antia had never married. They had known each other for three decades, since Jago Antia had been a captain, and they had long ago discarded with the formalities of master and servant.

"Couldn't sleep, Thapa. Don't know what it was."

Thapa raised an eyebrow. "Eat well then."

"Right. Ten minutes?"

Thapa turned smartly and strode off. He was a small, round man, not fat but bulging everywhere with the compact muscles of the mountains.

"Thapa?" Jago Antia called.

"Yes."

"Nothing." He had for a moment wanted to say something about the pain, but then the habit of a lifetime asserted itself, and he threw back his shoulders and shook his head. Thapa waited for a moment and then walked into the house. Now Jago Antia looked up at the razor edge of the ridge far above, and he could see, if he turned his head to one side, a line of tiny figures walking down it. They would be woodcutters, and perhaps some of the men he was fighting. They were committed, hardy, and well-trained. He watched them. He was better. The sun was high now, and Jago Antia went to his work.

The pain didn't go away, and Jago Antia couldn't sleep. Sometimes he was sure he was in his dream, and he was grateful for the velocity of the fall, and he could feel the cold on his face, the dark, but then he would sense something, a tiny glowing pinpoint that spun and grew and finally became a bright hurling maelstrom that wrenched him back into wakefulness. Against this he had no defense: no matter how tired he made himself, how much he exhausted his body, he could not make his mind insensible to his phantom pain, and so his discipline, honed over the years, was made useless. Finally

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he conquered his shame, and asked—in the strictest confidence—the colonel at Medical Services for medication, and got, along with a very puzzled stare, a bottle full of yellow pills, which he felt in his pocket all day, against his chest. But at night these pills too proved no match for the ferocity of the pain, which by now Jago Antia imagined as a beast of some sort, a low growling animal that camouflaged itself until he was almost at rest and then came rushing out to worry at his flesh, or at the memory of his flesh. It was not that Jago Antia minded the defeat, because he had learnt to accept defeat and casualties and loss, but it was that he had once defeated this flesh, it was he who had swung the kukri, but it had come back now and surprised him. He felt outflanked, and this infuriated him, and further, there was nothing he could do about it, there was nothing to do anything about.

So his work suffered, and he felt the surprise of those around him. It shamed him more than anything else that they were not disappointed, but sympathetic. They brought him tea without being asked, he noticed that his aides spoke amongst themselves in whispers, his headquarters ran—if it was possible—even more efficiently than before, with the gleam of spit and polish about it. But now he was tired, and when he looked at the maps he felt the effort he had to make to grasp the flow of the battle—not the facts, which were important, though finally trivial—but the thrust and the energy of the struggle, the movement of the initiative, the flux and ebb of the chaotic thing. One afternoon he sat in his office, the pain a constant hum just below his attention, and the rain beat down in gusts against the windows, and the gleam of lightning startled him into realizing that his jaw was slack, that he had been staring aimlessly out of the window at the green side of the mountain, that he had become the sort of commander he despised, a man who because of his rank allowed himself to become careless. He knew he would soon make the sort of mistake that would get some of his boys killed, and that was unacceptable: without hesitation he called the medical colonel and asked to be relieved of his command for medical reasons.

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The train ride to Bombay from Calcutta was two days long, and there was a kind of relief in the long rhythms of the wheels, in the lonely clangings of the tracks at night. Jago Antia sat next to a window in a first class compartment and watched the landscape change, taken back somehow to a fifth-grade classroom and lessons on the crops of the Deccan. Thapa had taken a week's leave to go to his family in Darjeeling and was to join up in Bombay later. Jago Antia was used to solitude, but the relief from immediate responsibility brought with it a rush of memory, and he found the unbidden recall of images from the past annoying, because it all seemed so useless. He tried to take up the time usefully by reading NATO journals, but even under the hard edge of his concentration the pain throbbed in time with the wheels, and he found himself remembering an afternoon at school when they had run out of history class to watch two fighter planes fly low over the city. By the time the train pulled into Bombay Central, he felt as if he was covered not only with sweat and grit, but also with an oily film of recollection, and he marched through the crowd towards the taxi stand, eager for a shower.

The house stood in a square plot on prime residential land in Khar, surrounded by new, extravagant constructions colored the pink and green of new money. But it was mostly dark brown, stained by decades of sea air and monsoon rains, and in the later afternoon sun it seemed to gather the light about it as it sat surrounded by trees and untidy bushes. There was, in its three stories, in the elegant arches on the balconies, and in the rows of shuttered windows, something rich and dense and heavy, like the smell of gun oil on an old hunting rifle, and the taxi driver sighed, "They don't build them like that any more."

"No, they're draughty and take a fortune to keep up," said Jago Antia curtly as he handed him the money. It was true. Amir Khan the housekeeper was waving slowly from the porch. He was very old, with a thin neck and a white beard that gave him the appearance of a heron, and by the time he was halfway down the flight of stairs Jago Antia had the bags out of the

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car and up to the house. Inside, with Amir Khan puffing behind him, he paused to let his eyes take to the darkness, but it felt as if he were pushing his way through something substantial and insidious, more clear than fog but as inescapable. It was still much as he had left it many years ago to go to the Academy. There were the Victorian couches covered with faded flower prints, the gold-rimmed paintings on the wall of his grandparents and uncles. He noticed suddenly how quiet it was, as if the street and the city outside had vanished suddenly.

"I'll take these bags upstairs," he said.

"Can't," Amir Khan said. "It's been closed up for years. All just sheets on the furniture. Even your parents slept in the old study. They moved a bed into it."

Jago Antia shrugged. It was more convenient on the ground floor in any case. "It's all right. It's just for a few days. I have some work here. I'll see Todywalla too."

"What about?"

"Well, I want to sell the house."

"You want to sell the house?"

"Yes."

Amir Khan shuffled away to the kitchen, and Jago Antia heard him knocking about with cups and saucers. He had no intention of using the house again, and he saw no other alternative. His parents were dead, gone one after another in a year. He had been a distant son, meeting them on leave in Delhi and Lucknow while they were on vacation. Wherever they had met, far away from Bombay, he had always seen the old disappointment and weariness in their eyes. Now it was over, and he wanted not to think about the house anymore.

"Good, sell this house." It was Amir Khan with a cup of tea. "Sell it."

"I will."

"Sell it." Jago Antia noticed that Amir Khan's hands were shaking, and he remembered suddenly an afternoon in the garden when he had made him throw ball after ball to his off side, and his own attempts at elegant square cuts, and the sun high overhead through the palm trees.

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"We'll do something for you," said Jago Antia. "Don't worry."

"Sell it," Amir Khan said, "I'm tired of it."

Jago Antia tried to dream of falling, but his ache stayed with him, and besides the gusts of water against the windows were loud and unceasing. It had begun to rain with nightfall, and now the white illumination of lightning threw the whole room into sharp relief. He was thinking about the Academy, about how he had been named Jago two weeks after his arrival. His roommate had found him at five o'clock on a Saturday morning doing push-ups on the gravel outside their room, and rubbing his eyes he had said, "Antia, you're an enthusiast." He had never known where the nickname Jago came from, but after the second week nobody except his parents had called him Jehangir again. When he had won the sword for Best Cadet even the colonel commandant of the Academy had said to him at the reviewing stand, "Good show, Jago." He had been marked for advancement early, and he had never betrayed his promise. He was thinking of this, and the wind flapped the curtains above him, and when he first heard the voice far away he thought it was a trick of the air, but then he heard it again. It was muffled by distance and the rain but he heard it clearly. He could not make out what it was saying. He was alert instantly and strapped on his leg. Even though he knew it was probably Amir Khan talking to himself, flicking away with a duster in the imagined light of some long-gone day, he moved cautiously, back against the wall. At the bottom of the hallway he paused, and heard it again, small but distinct, above him. He found the staircase and went up, his thighs tense, moving in a fluid half-squat. Now he was truly watchful, because the voice was too young to be Amir Khan. On the first landing, near an open door, he sensed a rush of motion on the balcony that ran around the outside of the house; he came to the corner, feeling his way with his hands. Everything in the darkness appeared as shades, blackness and deeper blackness. He darted a look around the corner, and

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the balcony was empty, he was sure of it. He came around the corner, back against the wall. Then he heard the movement again, not distinct footsteps but the swish of feet on the ground, one after the another. He froze. Whatever it was, it was coming towards him. His eyes ached in the darkness, but he could see nothing. Then the white blaze of lightning swept across the lawn, throwing the filigreed ironwork of the railing sharply on the wall, across Jago Antia's belly, and in the long light he saw on the floor the clearly outlined shape of shoes, one after another, the patches of water a sharp black in the light, and as he watched another footprint appeared on the tile, and then another, coming towards him.

Before it was dark again he was halfway down the stairs. He stopped, alone with the beating of his heart. He forced himself to stand up straight, to look carefully about and above the staircase for dead ground and lines of fire. He had learnt long ago that professionalism was a much better way to defeat fear than self-castigation and shame, and now he applied himself to the problem. The only possible conclusion was that it had been a trick of the light on the water, and so he was able to move up the staircase, smooth and graceful once again. But on the landing a breath of air curled around his ankle like a flow of cool liquid, and he began to shiver. It was a freezing chill that spread up his thighs and into his groin, and it caught him so suddenly that he let his teeth chatter for a moment. Then he bit down, but despite his straining he could hardly take a step before he stopped again. It was so cold that his fingers ached. His eyes filled with moisture and suddenly the dark was full of soft shadows. Again he heard the voice, far away, melancholy and low. With a groan he collapsed against the banister and slid down the stairs, all the way to the bottom, his leg rattling on the steps. Through the night he tried it again and again, and once he made it to the middle of the landing, but the fear took the strength from his hips, so that he had to crawl on hands and knees to the descent. At dawn he sat shaken and weak on the first step, his arm around the comforting curve of the thick round post.

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Finally it was the shock in Thapa's eyes that raised Jago Antia from the stupor he had fallen into. For three days he had been pacing, unshaven and unwashed, at the bottom of the stairs, watching the light make golden shapes in the air. Now Thapa had walked through the front door, and it was his face, slack, and the fact that he forgot to salute that conveyed to Jago Antia how changed he was, how shocking he was.

"It's all right," Jago Antia said. "I'm all right."

Thapa still had his bag in his right hand and an umbrella in the left, and he said nothing. Jago Antia remembered then a story that was a part of his own legend: he had once reduced a lieutenant to tears because of a tea stain on his shirt. It was quite true.

"Put out a change of clothes," he said. "And close your mouth."

The water in the shower drummed against Jago Antia's head and cleared it. He saw the insanity of what had gone on for three days, and he was sure it was exhaustion. There was nothing there, and the important thing was to get to the hospital, and then to sell the house. He ate breakfast eagerly, and felt almost relaxed. Then Amir Khan walked in with a glass of milk on a tray. For three days he had been bringing milk instead of tea, and now when Jago Antia told him to take it back to the kitchen, he said, "Baba, you have to drink it. Mummy said so. You know you're not allowed to drink tea." And he shuffled away, walking through a suddenly-revived age when Jehangir Antia was a boy in knickers, agile and confident on two sunburnt legs. For a moment Jago Antia felt time slipping around him like a dark wave, but then he shook away the feeling and stood up.

"Call a taxi," he said to Thapa.

The doctors at Jaslok were crisp and confident in their poking and prodding, and the hum of machinery comforted him. But Todywalla, sitting in his disorderly office, said bluntly, "Sell that house? Na, impossible. There's something in it."

"Oh don't be ridiculous," said Jago Antia vehemently. "That's absurd."

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Todywalla looked keenly at him. Todywalla was a toothless old man with a round black cap squarely on the middle of his head. "Ah," he said. "So you've heard it too."

"I haven't heard a damn thing," Jago Antia said. "Be rational."

"You may be a rationalist," Todywalla said. "But I sell houses in Bombay." He sipped tea noisily from a chipped cup. "There's something in that house."

When the taxi pulled through the gate Thapa was standing in the street outside, talking to a vegetable seller and two other men. As Jago Antia pulled off his shoes in the living room, Thapa came in and went to the kitchen. He came back a few minutes later with a glass of water.

"Tomorrow I will find my cousin at the bank at Nariman Point," he said. "And we will get somebody to come to this house. We shouldn't sleep here."

"What do you mean, somebody?"

"Somebody who can clean it up." Thapa's round face was tight, and there were white crescents around his temples. "Somebody who knows."

"Knows what exactly? What are you talking about?"

Thapa nodded towards the gate. "No one on this street will come near this place after dark. Every one knows. They were telling me not to stay here."

"Nonsense."

"We can't fight this, saab," Thapa said. After a pause: "Not even you."

Jago Antia stood erect. "I will sleep tonight quietly and so will you. No more of this foolishness." He marched into the study and lay on the bed, loosening his body bit by bit, and under the surface of his concentration the leg throbbed evenly. The night came on and passed. He thought finally that nothing would happen, and there was a gray outside the window, but then he heard again the incessant calling. He took a deep breath, and walked into the drawing room. Thapa was standing by the door, his whole body straining away from the stairs.

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Jago Antia took two steps forward. "Come on," he said. His voice rustled across the room, and both of them jerked. He read the white tightness of terror around Thapa's mouth, and as he had done many times before he led by example. He felt his legs move far away, towards the stairs, and he did not look behind him to see if Thapa was following. He knew the same pride and shame which was taking him up the stairs would bring Thapa: as long as they saw themselves in each other's eyes they would not let the other down. He had tested this in front of machine guns and found it to be true. So now they moved, Thapa a little behind and flanking, up the stairs. This time he came up to the landing and was able to move out, through the door, onto the balcony. He was moving, moving. But then the voice came around a corner and he stood still, feeling a rush in his veins. It was amazing, he found himself thinking, how localized it was. He could tell from moment to moment where it was on the balcony. It was not a trick of the wind, not a hallucination. Thapa was still against the wall, his palms against it, his mouth working back and forth, looking exactly where Jago Antia was. It came closer, and now Jago Antia was able to hear what it was saying: "Where shall I go?" The question was asked with a sob in it, like a tearing hiccup, so close that Jago Antia heard it shake the small frame that asked it. He felt a sound in his own throat, a moan, something like pain, sympathy. Then he felt the thing pause, and though there was nothing but the air he felt it coming at him, first hesitating, then faster, asking again, where shall I go, where, and he backed away from it, fast, tripping over his heels, and he felt the railing of the balcony on his thighs, hard, and then he was falling.

The night was dark below. They plummeted head-first from the belly of the plane into the cool pit at a thousand feet, and Jago Antia relished the leap into reality. They had been training long enough, and now he did not turn his head to see if the stick was tight because he knew his men and their skill. The chute popped with a flap, and after the jerk he flew

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the sky with his legs easy in the harness. Then the only feature he could see was the silver curve of the river far below, and then quite suddenly the dark mass of trees and the swathe of fields. There were no lights in the city of Sylhet, but he knew it was there, to the east, and he knew the men who were in it, defending against him, and he saw the problem clearly and the movements across the terrain below.

Then he was rolling across the ground, and the chute was off. Around him was the controlled confusion of a nighttime drop, and swiftly out of that formed the shape of his battalion. He had the command group around him, and in a few minutes they were racing towards their first objectives. Now he was sweating freely, and the weight of his pistol swung against his hip. He could smell the cardamom seeds his radioman was chewing. In the first gray, to the east, the harsh tearing noise of LMG fire flung the birds out of the trees. *Delta Bravo I have contact over.* As Jago Antia thumbed the mouthpiece, his radioman smiled at him, nineteen and glowing in the dawn. *Delta Bravo, bunkers, platoon strength, I am going in now.* Alpha Company had engaged.

As the day came they moved into the burning city, and the buildings were torn by explosions and the shriek of rockets skimming low over the streets and ringing off the walls. Now the noise echoed and boomed, and it was difficult to tell where it was coming from, but Jago Antia still saw it all forming on his map, which was stained black now with sweat here and there, and dust, and the plaster knocked from the walls by bullets. He was icy now, his mind holding it all, and as an excited captain reported to him he listened silently, and there was the flat crack of a grenade, not far off, and the captain flinched, then blushed as he saw that Jago Antia was calm as if he were walking down a golf course in Wellingdon, not a street shining with glass, thousands of shards sharp as death, no, he was meditative and easy. So the captain went back to his boys with something of Jago Antia's slow watchfulness in his walk, and he put away his nervousness and smiled at them, and they nodded, crouched behind cracked walls, sure of each other and Jago Antia.

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Now in the morning the guns echoed over the city, and a plummy BBC voice sounded over a Bush radio in the remnants of a tailor's shop: "Elements of the Indian Para Brigade are said to be in the outskirts of Sylhet. Pakistani troops are dug in . . ." Jago Antia was looking at the rounded curves of the radio on the tailor's shelf, at the strange white knobs and the dial from decades ago, at the deep brown wood, and a shiver came from low on his back into his heart, a whisper of something so tiny that he could not name it, and yet it broke his concentration and took him away from his body and this room with its drapes of cloth to somewhere else, a flickering vision of a room, curtains blowing in a gusting wind, a feeling of confusion, he shook his head and swallowed. He curled the knob with the back of his hand so that it snapped the voice off and broke with a crack. Outside he could feel the fight approaching a crisis, the deep whiplash of the 7.62s and the lighter Pakistani fire, cresting and falling like waves but always higher, it was likely the deciding movement. He had learnt the waiting that was the hardest part of commanding, and now the reports came quickly, and he felt the battle forming to a crescendo; he had a reserve, sixty men, and he knew now where he was going to put them. They trotted down the street to the east and paused on a dusty street corner (the relentless braying scream of a Bren nearby), and Jung the radioman pointed to a house at the end of the street, a white three-storied house with a decorative vine running down the font in concrete, now chipped and holed. "Tall enough," Jago Antia said: he wanted a vantage point to see the city laid out for him. He started off confidently across the street, and then all the sound in the world vanished, leaving a smooth silence, he had no recollection of being thrown, but now he was falling through the air, down, he felt distinctly the impact of the ground, but again there was nothing, no sound.

After a while he was able to see the men above him as he was lifted, their lips moving serenely even though their faces were twisted with emotion, they appeared curved and bent inwards against a spherical sky. He shut and opened his eyes

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several times, searching for connections that seemed severed. They carried him into a house. Then he was slowly able to hear again, and with the sound he began to feel the pain. His ears hurt sharply and deep inside his head, in a place in which he had never felt pain before. But he strained and finally he was able to find, inside, some part of himself, and his body jerked, and they held him still. His jaw cracked, and he said: "What?"

It was a mine on the corner, they told him. Now he was fighting it, he was using his mind, he felt his strength coming back, he could find his hands, and he pushed against the bed and sat up. A corpsman pushed at his shoulders, but he struck the hands away and took a deep breath. Then he saw his leg. Below his right knee the flesh was white and twisted away from the bone. Below the ankle was a shapeless bulk of matter, and the corpsman was looking for the artery but as Jago Antia watched the black blood seeped out onto the floor. Outside, the firing was ceaseless now, and Jago Antia was looking at his leg, and he realized that he no longer knew where his boys were. The confusion came and howled around his head, and for a moment he was lost. "Cut it off," he said then. "Off."

But, said the corpsman, but, holding up the useless bandages, I have nothing, and Jago Antia felt his head swim on an endless swell of pain, it took him up and away and he could no longer see, and it left him breathless and full of loss. "No time. Cut it off now," he said, but the corpsman was dabbing with the bandages. Jago Antia said to Jung: "You do it, now. Quickly." They were all staring at him, and he knew he could not make them cut him. "Give me your kukri," he said to Jung. The boy hesitated but then the blade came out of its scabbard with a hiss that Jago Antia heard despite the ceaseless roar outside. He steadied himself and gripped it with both hands and shut his eyes for a moment, and there was impossibly the sound of the sea inside him, a sob rising in his throat, he opened his eyes and fought it, pulled against it with his shoulders as he raised the kukri above his head, against darkness and mad sorrow, and then he brought the

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blade down below his knee. What surprised him was the crunch it made against the bone. In four strokes he was through. Each was easier. "Now," he said, and the corpsman tied it off. Jago Antia waved off the morphine, and he saw that Jung the radioman was crying. On the radio Jago Antia's voice was steady. He took his reports, and then he sent his reserve in. They heard his voice across Sylhet. "Now then," he said, "Finish it."

The room that Jago Antia woke up in had a cracked white ceiling, and for a long time he did not know where he was, in Sylhet (he could feel an ache under his right knee), in the house of his childhood after a fall from the balcony, or in some other room, unknown: everything seemed to be thrown together in his eyes without shape or distinction, and from moment to moment he forgot the flow of time, and found himself talking to Amir Khan about cricket, and then suddenly it was evening. Finally he was able to sit up in bed, and a doctor fussed about him: there were no injuries, the ground was soft from the rain, his paratrooper's reflexes had turned him in the air and rolled him on the ground, but he was bruised, and a concussion could not be ruled out. He was to stay in bed and rest. When the doctor left Thapa brought in a plate of rice and dal, and stood at the foot of the bed with his arms behind him. "I will talk to my cousin tonight."

Jago Antia nodded. There was nothing to say. But when the exorcist came two days later he was not the slavering tribal magician that Jago Antia was expecting, but a sales manager from a large electronics company. Without haste and without stopping he put his briefcase down, stripped off his black pants and white shirt and blue tie, and bathed under the tap in the middle of the garden. Then he put on a white dhoti and daubed his forehead with a white powder, and meanwhile Thapa was preparing a thali with little mounds of rice and various kinds of colored paste and a small diya, with the wick floating in the oil. Then the man took the thali from Thapa and walked slowly into the house, and as he came closer Jago

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Antia saw that he was in his late forties, that he was heavyset, that he was neither ugly nor handsome. "My name is Thakker," he said to Jago Antia before he sat cross-legged in the middle of the living room, in front of the stairs, and lit the diya. It was evening now, and the flame was tiny and flickering in the enormous darkness of the room.

As Thakker began to chant and throw fistfuls of rice from his thali into the room Jago Antia felt all the old irritation return, and he was disgusted with himself for letting this insanity gather around him. He walked out into the garden and stood with the grass rustling against his pants. There was a huge bank of clouds on the horizon, mass upon mass of dark heads piled up thousands of feet high, and as he watched a silver dart of lightning flickered noiselessly, and then another. Now his back began to ache slightly, and he shook his head slowly, overwhelmed by the certainty that he no longer knew anything. He turned around and looked up the path, into the house, and through the twilight he could see the tiny gleam of Thakker's diya, and as he watched Thakker lifted the thali and walked slowly towards the stairs, into the shadow, so that finally it seemed that the flame was rising up the stairs. Then Thapa came out, and they stood in the garden together, and the breeze from the sea was full of the promise of rain. They waited as night fell, and sometimes they heard Thakker's voice, lifted high and chanting, and then, very faint, that other voice, blown away by the gusts of wind. Finally—Jago Antia did not know what time it was—Thakker came down the stairs, carrying the thali, but the diya was blown out. They walked up to meet him on the patio, under the faint light of a single bulb.

"It is very strong," he said.

"What is it?" said Jago Antia angrily.

Thakker shrugged. "It is most unmovable." His face was drawn and pale. "It is a child. It is looking for something. Most terrible. Very strong."

"Well, get it out."

"I cannot. Nobody can move a child."

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Jago Antia felt a rush of panic, like a steady pressure against his chest.

Thapa said, "What can we do?"

Thakker walked past them, down the stairs, and then he turned and looked up at them. "Do you know who it is?" Jago Antia said nothing, his lips held tightly together to stop them from trembling. "It is most powerful because it is a child and because it is helpless and because it is alone. Only one who knows it and who is from its family can help it. Such a person must go up there naked and alone. Remember, alone and naked, and ask it what it seeks." Thakker wiped away the white powder from his forehead slowly, and then he turned and walked away. It was now drizzling, fat drops that fell out of the sky insistently.

Out of the darkness Thakker called. "You must go." Then a pause in which Jago Antia could hear, somewhere, rushing water. "Help him."

At the bottom of the stairs Jago Antia felt his loneliness like a bitterness in his nostrils, like a stench. Thapa watched from the door, remote already, and there seemed to be nothing in the world but the shadows ahead, the creaking of the old house, the wind in the balconies. As Jago Antia walked slowly up the stairs, unbuttoning his shirt, his pulse was rushing in his head, each beat like an explosion, not out of fear any more but from a kind of anticipation, because now he knew who it was, who waited for him. On the landing he kicked off his shoes and unbuckled his belt, and whispered, "What can you want from me, I was a child too." He walked slowly around the balcony, and the rain dashed against his shoulders and rolled down his back. He came to the end of the balcony, at a door with beveled glass, and he peered through it, and he could dimly make out the ornate curves of his mother's dressing table, the huge mirror, and beyond that the bed now covered with sheets, he stood with his face against the cool pane. He shut his eyes. Somewhere deep came the poisonous seep of memory, he felt it in his stomach like a living stream, and

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his mother was looking at him, her eyes unfocussed in a kind of daze. She was a very beautiful woman, and she was sitting in front of her mirror now as she always did, but her hair was untidy, and she was wearing a white sari. He was sitting on the edge of her bed, his feet stuck out, and he was looking at his black shoes and white socks, and he was trying to be very still because he did not know what was going to happen next. He was dressed up, and the house was full of people, but it was very quiet and the only sounds were the pigeons on the balcony. He was afraid to move, and after a while he began to count his breaths, in and out. Then his father came in, he stood next to his mother, put a hand on her shoulder, and they looked at each other for a long time, and he wanted to say that they looked like their picture on the mantelpiece, only older and in white, but he knew he couldn't so he kept himself still and waited. Then his father said to his mother, come, and they rose and he walked behind them a little. She was leaning on his father, and they came down the stairs and everyone watched them. Downstairs he saw his uncles and aunts and other people he didn't know, and in the middle of the room there was a couch and on it lay his brother Sohrab. Sohrab had been laid out and draped in a white sheet. There was a kind of oil lamp with a wick burning near Sohrab's head, and a man was whispering a prayer into his ear. There was a smell of sandalwood in the air. Then his mother said, "Soli, Soli," and his father turned his face away, and a breath passed through the room, and he saw many people crying. That was what they always called Sohrab. He was Soli, and that was how Jehangir always thought of him. His mother was kneeling next to Soli, and his father too, and he was alone, and he didn't know what to do, but he stood straight up, and he kept his hands by his sides. Then two men came forward, and they covered Soli's face, and then other people lifted him up, and they took him through the door, and for a long time he could see them walking through the garden towards the gate. His mother was sitting on the sofa with her sisters, and after a while he turned around and walked up the stairs, and above

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there was nobody, and he walked through the rooms and around the balcony, and after a while he thought he was waiting for something to happen, but it never did.

Jago Antia's forehead trembled against the glass and now he turned and walked down the corridor that ran around the house, through darkness and sudden light, and he walked by a playroom, and then his father's study, and as he walked he felt that it was walking beside him, in front of him, around him. He heard the voice asking its question but his own desperate question seemed to twist in his throat and come out only as a sound, a sort of sob of anger. It went into the room that had been his room and Soli's room, and he stopped at the door, his chest shaking, looking at the floor where they had wrestled each other, the bureau between the beds on which they had stacked their books and their toys. The door creaked open under his hand, and inside he sat on this bed, in the middle, where he used to, and they were listening to the Binaca Geet Mala on the radio, Soli loved his radio and the Binaca Geet Mala. He was lying on the bed in his red pyjamas and the song went *Maine shayad tumhe pahale bhi kahin dekha hai*, Soli sang along with it, Jehangir was not allowed to touch the radio, but when Soli was away he sometimes played with the knobs, and once he switched it on and heard a hiss and a voice far away speaking angrily in a language he didn't understand, it scared him and he ran away from it, and Soli found his radio on, and then there was a fight. Jehangir lost the fight, but Soli always won, even with the other boys on the street, he was fearless, and he jumped over walls, and he led them all, and at cricket he was always the captain of one side, and sometimes in the evenings, still in his barrister's clothes, their father watched their games in the garden, and he said that Soli had a lovely style. When he said this the first time Jehangir raised his head and blinked because he understood instantly what his father meant, he had known it all along but now he knew the words for it, and he said it to himself sometimes under his breath, a lovely style, a lovely style. Now Soli raised himself up in bed on an elbow, and

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Amir Khan brought in two glasses of milk on a tray, and then their father came in and sat as he did on Soli's bed, and tonight he had *The Illustrated Weekly of India* in his hand, folded open to a tall picture of a man with a moustache and a bat, and he said, "Look at him; he was the Prince." So he told them about Ranji-Sinhji, who was really a prince, who went to England where they called him nigger and wog, but he showed them, he was the most beautiful batsman, like a dancer he turned their bouncers to the boundaries with his wrists, he drove with clean elegance, he had good manners, and he said nothing to their insults, and he showed them all he was the best of them all, he was the Prince, he was lovely. After their father left Soli put *The Illustrated Weekly* in his private drawer, and after that Jehangir would see him take it out and look at it, and sometimes he would let Jehangir look at it, and Jehangir would look at the long face and the pride in the stance and the dark opaque eyes, and he would feel a surge of pride himself, and Soli would have his wiry hand on his shoulder, and they would both say together, Ranji-Sinhji, Ranji.

That summer one Sunday afternoon they were dozing in the heat when suddenly Burjor Mama came in and tumbled them both out of bed, roaring what a pair of sleepyhead sissy types, and they laughed with delight because he was their favorite uncle. They knew his arrival meant at least two weeks of unexpected pleasures, excursions to Juhu, sailing trips, films, shows and sizzling forbidden pavement foods. Their mother came in and hugged him close, and they were embarrassed by her tears, Burjor was her only younger brother and more precious for his profession of soldiering, she was exclaiming now how he was burnt black by the sun, what are they doing to you now, and he was really dark, but Jehangir liked his unceasing whiplike energy and the sharp pointed ends of his handlebar moustache. Barely pausing to thump down his hold-all and his suitcase, he gathered up the whole family, Amir Khan included, and he whisked them off for a drive, and he whistled as he drove. On the way back Jehangir,

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weighted down with ice cream, fell asleep with his head in his mother's lap, and once for a moment he awoke and saw, close to his face, his mother's hand holding her brother's wrist tenderly and close, her delicate fingers very pale against his skin with the strong corded muscles underneath.

And Jago Antia, walking down the corridor, walking, felt the sticky sleep of childhood and the cosy hum of the car and safety. And then he was at the bottom of a flight of stairs, he knew he had to go up, because it had gone before him, and now he stumbled because the pain came, and it was full of fear, he went up, one two three, and then leaned over, choking. Above him the stairs angled into darkness and the roof he knew so well, and he couldn't move, again he was trembling, and the voice was speaking somewhere ahead, he said, "I don't want to go," but then he heard it again. He knew his hands were shaking, and he said, "All right you bastard, naked, naked," and he tore at the straps, and then the leg rolled down the stairs to the bottom. He went up, hunching, on hands and knees, his lips curled back and breathing in huge gasps.

Burjor Mama bought them a kite. On Monday morning he had to report in Colaba for work, and so Jehangir's mother brought up his pressed uniform and put it on the bed in the guest room. Jehangir lay on the bed next to the uniform and took in its peculiar smell, it was a deep olive green, and the bars on the front were of many colors but mainly red and orange, and above a breast pocket it said, B. MEHTA. Jehangir's mother sat on the bed too and smoothed out the uniform with an open palm, and then Burjor Mama came out of the bathroom in a towel. As he picked up the shirt, Jehangir saw under the sadra, under and behind his left arm, a scar shaped like a star, brown and hard against the pale skin. Then Jehangir looked up and he saw his mother's face, tender and proud and a little angry as she looked at Burjor. After breakfast Soli and Jehangir walked with him to the gate, and he said, "See you later, alligators," and in the afternoon they waited on the porch for him, reading comics and sipping at huge glasses of

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squash. When the taxi stopped at the gate they had run forward, whooping, because even before he was out they had seen the large triangle of the kite, and then they ran up without pause to the roof, Soli holding the kite at the ends, and Jehangir following behind with the roll of string. Jehangir held the roll as Soli spun off the manjha, and Soli said, watch your fingers, and Burjor showed them how to tie the kite string, once up, once down, and then they had it up in the air, it was doing spirals and rolls, and Soli said, "Yaar, that's a fighting kite!" Nobody was flying to fight with nearby, but when their father came up he laughed and watched them, and when they went down to tea Soli's fingers were cut from the manjha, and when Jehangir asked Burjor Mama said, "It's ground glass on the line."

Now he came up the stairs, his stump bumping on the edges of the stone, and his palm scraped against something metal, but he felt the sting distantly and without interest. The next day Soli lay stretched across the roof, his mouth open. Jago Antia pulled himself up, his arms around a wooden post, and he could see the same two-level roof, Amir Khan's old room to one side, with its sloping roof coming to the green posts holding it up, beyond that the expanse of brick open to the sky, and then a three-foot drop with a metal ladder leading to the lower level of the roof, and beyond that the treetops and the cold stretch of the ocean. He let go of the post and swayed gently in the rain. Soli walked in front of him, his hands looping back the string, sending the kite fluttering strongly through the sky, and Jehangir held the coil and took up the slack. It flew in circles above them. "Let me fly it," Jehangir said. "Let me fly it." But Soli said, "You can't hold this, it'll cut you." "I can hold anything. I can." "You can't, it'll hurt you." "It won't. I won't let it." And Jehangir ran forward, Soli danced away, light and confident, backwards, and then for a moment his face was surprised, And then he was lying below, three feet below on the ground, and the string flew away from him. Jago Antia dropped to his knee, then fell heavily on his side. He pulled himself through the

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water, to the edge, next to the metal stairs, and he peered down trying to see the bottom but it seemed endless, but he knew it was only three feet below. How can somebody die falling three feet? He heard the voice asking its question, where shall I go, and he roared into the night, "What do you want? What the hell is it you want?" But it wouldn't stop, and Jago Antia knelt on the edge and wept, "What do you want," and finally he said, "Look, look," and he pushed himself up, leaned forward, and let himself go, and he fell: he saw again Soli backing away, Jehangir reaching up trying to take his hand away from the string, Soli holding his hand far up, and Jehangir helpless against his strength. Then Soli smiling, standing, and Jehangir shouting and running forward and jumping, the solid impact of his small body against Soli's legs, Soli's look of surprise, he's falling, reaching wildly, Jehangir's hand under the bottom of Soli's shorts, he holds on and tries, holds and pulls, but then he feels the weight taking him over, and he won't let go, but he hasn't the strength, he's falling with Soli, he feels the impact of the bricks through Soli's body.

When Jago Antia stirred weakly on the roof, when he looked up, it was dawn. He held himself up and said, "Are you still here? Tell me what you want." Then he saw at the parapet, very dim and shifting in the gray light, the shape of a small body, a boy looking down over the edge towards the ocean. As Jago Antia watched, the boy turned slowly, and in the weak light he saw that the boy was wearing a uniform of olive green, and he asked, "Where shall I go?" Jago Antia began to speak, but then his voice caught, because he was remembering his next and seventh birthday, the first party without Soli, and his parents holding him between them, soothing him, saying you must want something, and he looking up at their faces, at the lines in his father's face, the exhaustion in his mother's eyes. Burjor Mama sits on the carpet behind him with head down, and Amir Khan stands behind, and Jehangir shakes his head, nothing. His mother's eyes fill with tears, and she kisses him on the forehead, "Baba, it's all right, let

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us give you a present," and his heart breaks beneath a surging weight, but he stands up straight and looking at her and his father, he says, "I want a uniform." So Jago Antia looked at the boy as he came closer, and he saw the small letters above the pocket, J. ANTIA, and the sun came up, and he saw the boy clearly, he saw the enormous dark eyes, and in the eyes he saw his vicious and ravenous strength, his courage and his devotion, his silence and his pain, his whole misshapen and magnificient life, and Jago Antia said, "Jehangir, Jehangir, you're already at home."

Thapa and Amir Khan came up the stairs slowly, and he called out to them, "Come, come. I'm all right." He was sitting cross-legged, watching the sun move in and out of the clouds.

Thapa squatted beside him. "Was it here?"

"He's gone. I saw him, and then he vanished."

"Who?"

Jago Antia shook his head. "Someone I didn't know before."

"What was he doing here then?"

"He was lost." He leaned on both their shoulders, one arm around each, for the descent down the stairs. Somehow, naked and hopping from stair to stair, he was smiling. He knew that nothing had changed. He knew he was still and forever Jago Antia, that for him it was too late for anything but a kind of solitude, that he would give his body to the fire, that in the implacable hills to the North, among the rocks, he and other men and women, each with histories of their own, would find each other for life and for death. And yet he felt free. He sat on the porch, strapping his leg on, and Amir Khan brought out three cups of tea. Thapa wrapped a sheet around him, and looking at each other they both laughed. "Thank you," Jago Antia said. Then they drank the tea together.

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Paris between the Wars

Virgil Thomson

Virgil Thomson visited Paris in 1921 and lived there from October 1925 to August 1940. It was during his long stay in Paris that he became an important American composer. He is considered the first serious modern composer to set English to music without distorting its natural rhythms and inflections. In the 1930s Thomson helped to found the neo-romantic movement in music and painting centered in Paris. In 1928, in collaboration with Gertrude Stein, he wrote his first opera, Four Saints in Three Acts, *which was produced in 1934. He went on to compose settings for several of Stein's texts and a second opera,* The Mother of Us All, *also with a libretto by Gertrude Stein. In the early 1930s he began to compose "portraits" after the model of her literary portraits. Upon returning to the United States, he became the music critic for the* New York Herald Tribune. *He continued to write music: a classical ballet, a third opera and scores for films, among them* Louisiana Story, *which earned him a Pulitzer Prize. He won the New York Critics Circle Award for* The Virgil Thomson Reader *(1981) and, in 1983, the Kennedy Center Honors for lifetime*

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achievement. He died in New York in September 1989 at the age of ninety-four.

During his time abroad he was personally acquainted with most of the writers, musicians, sculptors and painters who helped make Paris between the wars the artistic capital of the world. "I've always had a comprehensive mentality," he said, his speech still mellowed by the accent of his native Missouri. "From my earliest times, I read books, and I was brought up with the blessed smell of turpentine. . . . I've had my friends among the poets and painters far more than among musicians."

In what follows, Thomson talks about his relationships with people he knew in Paris. It is a monologue constructed from conversations recorded in February 1981 in Windsor, Ontario.

AMERICANS WELCOME

I have just been reading yesterday and this morning a biography of Josephine Baker that describes Paris and Berlin in the twenties. It is thoroughly recognizable to me, though I was not that intoxicated by it. Many people were, of course, and one realizes, looking back, that the air was electric. The explanation frequently offered is that every French family had at least one dead one in it from World War I, and although they were in mourning, they were very happy to have Americans around. Of course, Americans were the great deliverers in World War I, and thus were very popular all through the post-war years. This book suggests that French women who had worked in industries and offices during the war were feeling the need for some liberation. In those days French women could not have bank accounts. They could not vote; they could not practice the professions; the only liberation that was available to them was love and sex. It was somewhere in the middle twenties, I think, that women doctors and women lawyers began to break through. Eventually, French women acquired the vote and the right to have bank accounts. But in the twenties they were on the march, and France was traditionally

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the country of freedom, and French women were traditionally fun anyway.

NADIA BOULANGER

I fell into the warm pedagogical embraces of Nadia Boulanger when I first went to Paris in 1921 as a music student straight out of Harvard. Nadia Boulanger had three American students that year. Besides myself there was Aaron Copland, and another fellow from Harvard—he was a good musician—named Melville Smith. Afterwards, practically everybody in America studied with Nadia. She had a particular gift for Americans, which could also apply to the English, the Scandinavians, South Americans and later the Persians, the Hungarians, the Japanese, all sorts of *Ausländer*. But she never had that kind of success with the central musical nationalities of Europe, which are France, Germany and Italy. I think that what made her so effective as a teacher with Americans was simply her genius for instant criticism. And when I say criticism, I don't mean necessarily verbalized criticism. She could look at what you had written, and understand what you *meant* by it. She didn't even have to tell you what you meant by it, because musical things aren't that easy to verbalize. You could see in her face that she understood it. Now, a young Frenchman, or a French woman—let's just say man for the time being . . . (Understand that there's no prejudice about all this. The mere fact that I went to a woman teacher will place me on the side of the angels.) . . . a young French musician, or German, or Italian would be highly aware of the relation between his mind and his emotions. A young French composer writes a piece of music: he knows exactly what he has done. He knows most of it even before he's done it. The French are brought up, grow up, in an atmosphere, both in school and out, of constant, penetrating, carping criticism—so that understanding oneself is a necessity for survival. Now Americans grow up in an atmosphere in which criticism is practically forbidden, and anyway the kiddies won't take it. So that when they get a bit grown up and start writing music, they haven't

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the vaguest idea what they've done. The French didn't need her. She was a good teacher, she worked at the conservatory, she worked at the *École normale de musique*, sure. She could teach all the standard things, but she was no revelation to them, or to Germans or Italians. But to Americans who needed that kind of understanding, mental understanding, she was a great boon. This instant power of criticism—she knew what you meant—enabled her, then, to put you at ease in front of the music paper. Our pedagogues didn't help much. You know, in my day they were nearly all German-trained, and somehow they made it seem a little daring of the student even to write a piece of music at all. And it was, in class and out, always compared unfavorably with the finest work of Bach, Beethoven and Brahms. Well, that's not going to encourage anybody to go on. But you're stubborn and you do go on. With Nadia, you weren't doing a daring action to write a piece of music. It turned out that it was more or less like writing a letter: you heard something and you wrote it down. And then you read it over to see whether it came out right. So putting a student at ease in front of the paper enabled her to help the student establish the writing of music as a necessary habitual daily function. And that means you don't worry about it. You can worry about each piece, but you don't have to worry about whether you're going to lose your talent overnight.

SATIE

Erik Satie was very important to me. When I first encountered his music—in Cambridge, Massachusetts before I ever went to France—his music was, for me, rich nourishment. It's not rich music; it's poor music. It has very few notes, but they all go the right places, and they don't go to the expected places.

When I met him in 1921, Satie himself, of course, was already sixty years old and rather famous in limited circles, musical circles, you see. He was secretive. He didn't tell you about his private life. It was only after he died that people

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discovered what his private life was. He lived in a workers' suburb called Arcueil, which he could only get to by streetcar. The last streetcar left Paris at midnight, and if he stayed out for dinner and missed that, he would simply walk home. It was, you know, quite a number of miles out there. And he lived in an unheated fifth-floor room. Nobody ever saw that room until after he died. But he liked going out and he liked being with friends. He liked to eat, he liked to drink. Eventually, of course, he died of cirrhosis of the liver. In his later years, he drank a great deal, but nobody ever saw him drunk. It was one of those trained livers that quietly consumes itself.

He had in his conversation the same kind of pointed wit that is in his music. He published a remark one day with regard to Maurice Ravel. Ravel had been offered the Légion d'Honneur, but he was mad at the French government because he thought he had been treated unfairly as an applicant for the *Prix de Rome* when he was involved with the Conservatory. Anyway, Ravel declined the Légion d'Honneur to show what he thought of the French government and its artistic actions. But Satie published this in a French newspaper: "Mister Ravel has refused the Légion d'Honneur, but all of his music accepts it." He also used to tell a story after World War I; he said, "They keep asking me why I don't write a big long symphony. I'm not that kind of composer. I'm a half-master. You see," he said, "during the war up on the Normandy coast around Harfleur, there was a little fishing boat that had somehow or other broken off half of its mast, and only had one, and so they called it 'the half-master.' It went around doing its little fishing jobs, and the German submarines would take a look at it and say, 'Oh, that's just a half-master.' But it did have a cannon concealed on board and used it." He said, "You see, that's what I am, just a half-master, but I've sunk more Germans than anybody."

GEORGE ANTHEIL

George Antheil and I actually were *the* American composers in residence in Paris. Everybody else was just there temporarily,

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but we had sort of identified ourselves with French life and dug in, and we considered ourselves, if not French, at least thoroughly Parisian. George came from Trenton, New Jersey, arrived in Paris by way of Berlin, and he could play the piano louder than anybody ever did. He said the Steinway was the only piano of which he couldn't break the strings by just sheer pounding. Well, I think he was just trying to get some free Steinways for his concerts. But they wouldn't let him have them because they didn't think that his music was favorable advertisement for their instruments. George lived in the rue de l'Odeon over Sylvia Beach's bookstore, Shakespeare & Company, in a small mezzanine above it, before you got up to the real first floor—an old flat, really one room and not too large at that. But George and his wife lived in that room, and he banged things out on the piano. His most famous piece, composed around 1925, was called *Ballet mécanique*. It was composed with the collaboration of the Playel Piano Company, in the form of rolls, you know, like for a mechanical piano. His original hope was to use in performance sixteen synchronized mechanical pianos. Well, the Playel Company never could get sixteen of them synchronized, and we didn't have loudspeakers in those days to blow things up in, so he just had to pump like mad with this feet, and add various percussion instruments, including some airplane propellers on pipes which made a terrific wind in the hall. Oh, everybody loved all that.

George Antheil was really launched not so much by musicians as he was by literary people, because, with his violence and infantile boyish charm, he was a literary man's idea of a musical genius.

EZRA POUND

I knew Ezra through George Antheil. He'd written a book about George Antheil, you know, and I think George helped him a little bit with his opera, *The Testament of Villon*. I'd heard the opera. It came on the spring or summer of 1926. I must have known Ezra earlier that spring or winter, because

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he was around Paris at the time, and very thick with George. I knew him that way.

Ezra and I once sat on a bench in the Luxembourg Gardens, and he said, "I like musicians. You stick around with me, you're likely to be famous." I didn't say anything, but I didn't want to stick around with Ezra. I didn't want to be managed. Ezra was all right, you know, but Ezra was not my chum, and there wasn't anything I wanted to do with his poetry. It was all right, it was first class, but I'd already become good friends with Gertrude Stein, and with her work long before knowing her. You just didn't take on everybody.

Ford Madox Ford later wrote that Ezra once pointed me out to him and said, "You see that man there? That's the enemy." He meant that I was the enemy of George Antheil's career. I had written nothing about George's music. I was a very good friend of George's, and we had given concerts together, but Ezra thought I was "the enemy." I was, in a way, the rival, so to speak. In any case, I was the other American composer writing music living in Paris. And I wouldn't let Ezra take me on.

A FALLING OUT

I didn't go to the first performance of George Antheil's *Ballet mécanique* because of George's and Ezra's secrecy with regard to material benefits. He was getting money from a number of rich ladies, and he certainly wasn't sharing any of it. Not that he should have shared it, but he might have written them about me. Actually, a whole series of concerts, which culminated in the public performance of *Four Saints*, took place at the house of a woman named Gross, an American woman whose husband was the first secretary at the embassy. She was very rich. Her mother was one of the Crockers of San Francisco. And it was *I* who had known her. She wanted to give some concerts for me. I said, "Fine, let's have George too." I brought him in on this. Whereupon Ezra instantly took it over, and began managing things and propagandizing and putting his friends into the audience—all of which was

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perfectly all right by me. But you see, I had shared this with George, and we did a series of programs, I think three or four at her house. It was a big house, and we had a public, a large public. But when it was decided to give the *Ballet mécanique* at the Champs-Elysées Theatre—it's not a piece that takes a whole concert; there were other works on the program, works of his, none of mine—I thought, well, I just won't go to that. I didn't quarrel with George about it at all, I just stayed away, said I had a cold.

GERTRUDE STEIN

Gertrude was entertaining every number of ways. We were very close friends for twenty years, and after she died, I was friends with Alice Toklas for another twenty years. And Gertrude and I wrote two operas together. You could hardly be closer friends, although there were more than twenty-five years between us in age. You see, we had some things in common; Harvard was one. She was a Radcliffe girl. She had been a pupil of William James. And we used to talk about World War I. We had greatly enjoyed World War I. Everybody had enjoyed World War I, compared to the more recent wars, which nobody liked. So we talked about the war, and we talked about Harvard, and then we talked about all of our friends. But we talked about all of those things in our Harvard and doughboy ways. And we got very thick about it, and Alice did not mind. Alice used to get rid of people sometimes if she was jealous of their close friendship with Gertrude. That happened with Ernest Hemingway, of course. But Alice didn't seem to mind, and so we got quite thick.

HEMINGWAY

Hemingway was not my general sort of chum. To begin with, he was a drinker, and he was always in the bars drinking with the boys, and I was not a drinker, and I didn't go to bars, didn't have the money for bars. And so I would see him at other people's houses. I respected his early writing, but when he started writing successful novels, then it was quite

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obvious that, as Zelda Fitzgerald said, "Nobody could be as manly as all that." He was kind of overdoing the he-man legend. We had both been brought up in the Midwest with enough of that around, so that I didn't have to take it too seriously. But it was obvious that he could write very powerful narrative sentences. I think he had learned a great deal of that from Gertrude, about making it compact.

Gertrude and Hemingway were very close, not only on literary grounds as colleagues who had done each other big services, but they were very close personally. You see, Gertrude was warm, and she shed an aura of sex around her. It worked on men, women, children and dogs. And it worked very strongly on Hemingway. And Gertrude liked young men. She didn't go to bed with them, but she liked them and was attracted by them. And Alice was always afraid it might happen.

Well, if I can say these words here, I'll tell you exactly what he said. He said, "I was in love with her, I wanted to fuck her." Now that's as clear as any man can state it.

FOUR SAINTS

When Gertrude and I first knew each other, I said, "Why don't you write me an opera libretto," and she said, "Fine, it'd be a good idea." So we sat together for a bit and picked out a theme which was mutually satisfactory. I don't think it does any good when writing an opera to pick out some ready-made novel or story and then ask a tame literary man to make you a libretto. It goes dead on you. It has to be a theme that is sufficiently friendly to you both so that it can inspire you, so to speak, through the labors of composition. Well, in the case of *Four Saints in Three Acts*, we settled on a theme from the lives of the saints, based on the old proposition that a serious Italian opera ought to have a mythological subject. Then she wrote a libretto, and I wrote the opera, and seven or eight years later it was produced. It is still being produced. It is an opera that is verbally obscure; it's in Gertrude's more hermetic manner.

Four Saints emerged from the history of music. I'd had a good deal of experience of hearing opera from my childhood

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on through. I didn't think it was a good idea to try to renovate the opera, that is to say, to import it into the English language by imitating more recent and decadent forms. The Wagnerian opera was overblown in that sense, and the Italian opera in my youth—dominated by Puccini and Leoncavallo, of course—was a popularized and degraded art form, not degrading but run-down. And I thought that to do anything serious about the opera in a new language, one needed to go back to the more primitive and strong forms. I thought Italian opera seria of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was exactly the sort of form one could do something with. And the general principles of that were a serious mythological subject with a tragic ending, in which the commerce of the play, so to speak, takes place in rapid recitative, and the emotional moments are formalized and concentrated into set pieces strung out along this recitative. I thought that was a healthy form one could do something with.

She knew nothing about musical forms; all she was interested in there was the idea of a mythological subject. We talked about that. I said, "Obviously we are not going into classical mythology. That's been overdone by the Duncan family right in our own time. German mythology is patented by Richard Wagner. I'm not going to compete with that. But," I said, "history and religion are sources of mythology." She said, "What about George Washington?" I said, "He's an eighteenth-century character, and they all wore wigs, and on stage I can't tell one from another. Besides, he's the father of his country; it's a little hard to demythologize him." And so we started looking for lives of the saints. The Italians, dominated in current usage by St. Francis, of course, were overdone, and one couldn't touch them. There were no German saints. The French saints were all kind of theological and stiff. But Gertrude had been a great deal to Spain, and she loved Spanish saints, and she said, "What about that?" I said, "It's okay by me. I've never been to Spain, but you find any saints you like." So she started work with that idea, and turned out a Spanish landscape, peopled with Spanish saints with whom

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she had, so to speak, geographical contact. One of these was St. Ignatius Loyola, whom she only knew through Montjuich in Barcelona. She had never been to Loyola.

One of the things about the twenties that's hard to explain to people is that we all took the religious life and the stories of the saints for something quite natural. If you've ever been to Ávila, of course, you're surrounded by St. Teresa. She walks down the street beside you. You go to the convent out in the country there where she used to make retreats, and it's that still same bare unpainted wood. I mean you could practically touch her. Her family house is there, and large marble things with her own writing. She wrote beautiful Spanish. Oh, she's all around the place. Of course, St. Francis is all over Assisi too. I didn't want to get into any particular saint's life that had been overdone, but I didn't select the saints. I agreed to the landscape and subject.

THE MOTHER OF US ALL

We later did an opera called *The Mother of Us All*, about nineteenth-century American politics, with Susan B. Anthony for a leading character, and that's hardly obscure at all. That gets performed a great deal more than *Four Saints*. Not that musical publics mind verbal obscurities; they're quite used to not understanding. But the *Four Saints*, on account of the built-in obscurity of the text, is very difficult for stage directors to handle. You can't find any ready-made solutions for what to do with the actors, whereas *The Mother of Us All*, being perfectly clear, is very easy to put on stage. So that turns out to be, if I may review it in these words, foolproof. It's had over three thousand performances in the last thirty years, and no matter what you do to it, it never flops. I think it's Gertrude's passion about America and feminism that is a large part of that communicative power. I would be modest on that level.

When she wrote the libretto for *The Mother of Us All*, she had changed her way of doing it. You see, the *Four Saints in Three Acts* is all about St. Teresa of Ávila. It's a landscape view of Ávila, with memories of books that she had read, and

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relics and things from the life of St. Teresa. But that was all three hundred years ago. It's a work of the imagination as far as the personages are concerned, but very real in terms of the landscape of upper Castile, particularly Ávila. It's really a landscape piece, and landscape in Gertrude's understanding of it was not necessarily a naturalistic form of writing. You evoked a landscape any way you could, which was frequently, with her, obscure, even willfully obscure. But *The Mother of Us All* is about nineteenth-century American history, which she had read devotedly for years. And born in 1874, she was a nineteenth-century character herself. She put into that libretto all those things that she knew not only from having read about them—Grant, Daniel Webster and Susan B. Anthony—but the nineteenth-century America that she was brought up in. I didn't select the characters. I actually suggested the nineteenth-century political life of America, and the use of deliberate, either altered or unaltered quotations, which she did a great deal of. But I wasn't telling her how to write poetry, and she wasn't telling me how to write music.

GERTRUDE AND MUSIC

Brought up in a well-to-do cultured Jewish family, naturally Gertrude had gone to symphony concerts and the opera. They all did. And she had heard everything by the time she was sixteen or eighteen but then she decided that music was not for her, and she liked the eye experiences: museums and pictures and so forth. Alice was a good musician. Alice had actually once played a piano with an orchestra. Gertrude had a musical background but no real ear.

GERTRUDE AND PAINTERS

I don't know whether painters have responded to her writing, but of course during her lifetime they all wanted to know her, because she was a kind of patron saint of modern painting and had a lot of it around. A blessing of your work by Gertrude Stein was good for business.

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JAMES JOYCE

I met James Joyce through Sylvia Beach and George Antheil. I think I met Joyce's wife once, at a party at Sylvia's house. I never knew her, and I never saw the daughter. I think I met the son once or twice. He had a bass voice, was a rather handsome fellow. But he didn't do so well as a singer, and he eventually married a woman of some property. During the spring of 1926, when Antheil's music and mine began to appear together on programs, James Joyce came to hear us and never failed to tell me that he liked my work. He didn't come up after and talk to me. He would go home, and I would see him later at Sylvia's bookstore. He wasn't one to come around after concerts, which is an old French habit, I must say. People do always come backstage, a great many of them. But he didn't see so well, and he usually had to go home. He was something of a musician. As a young man he had sung. He had a tenor voice and was rather proud of it and seemed to enjoy music. I think he knew how to listen to it.

He wanted me to make a ballet of chapter nine of *Finnegans Wake*—the chapter about children's games. And he offered assured production at the Paris opera under the direction of Leonide Massine, the most famous Russian choreographer of the period, Balanchine's predecessor in fame. Massine was riding high at the Paris opera and putting on ballets, and he sort of proposed this to Joyce, I think. Anyway, Joyce asked me to come and see him, which I did. He wasn't going out much at the time—this was already, you see, in the middle thirties. But the Gertrude Stein success in America—well, news of it had reached everywhere. And he knew me. We were on the best of terms, and he proposed—he didn't say so—but he thought I might be interested to do a dramatic work. I knew that that would have been a wounding blow to Gertrude, and Gertrude was a good friend. I didn't see why I should do that to her. When Adrienne Monnier published the French translation of *Ulysses*, she asked Picasso to make some illustrations. He often made illustrations for books. He turned her down. He wasn't going to do that to his old friend

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Gertrude either. You don't move around that way. It didn't matter that I was friends with Joyce. But to have done a public thing, to have moved over from her to what you might call the enemy, at least the store across the street, I thought would have been ungraceful. So I took the chapter home to read and I wrote him afterwards, "This is not a scenario for a ballet; it is a chapter in a book that is a piece of literature. If I simply take the subject of children's games in Dublin and use it for a ballet, I'm not using any of the Joyce in it, because the Joyce is in the words." I didn't mention, of course, that I could have made a musical setting of a sort of cantata nature, involving, you know, chorus, soloists, and words. Actually, I never liked singing with dance. Instrumental music loves dance, and dance loves it. But the old song-and-dance, while it is a routine in Vaudeville, has never worked terribly well in the serious ballet business. Anyway, I felt justified in refusing it on legitimate grounds.

JOYCE AND STEIN

Viewed nearby, James Joyce and Gertrude Stein appeared as planets of equal magnitude. Now he has the biggest public and he is in all the colleges, and he can be explained. Joyce's obscurity does open up on study. It is not private; it is multilingual, appropriate enough for a man who spent some years at a Berlitz school of languages in Trieste. I have nothing against that, you understand; it is brilliant and wonderful. But it is not the same problem as Gertrude. Gertrude sought obscurity and achieved it. Now obscurity you don't get famous for. Picasso's description of Joyce was that "he's an obscure writer that everybody will end by understanding." And that's exactly what's happened. That's why it is in the schools, and that's why it's popular. Also, Irish literature has always had a large market. There's nothing wrong with any of this.

Gertrude was extraordinarily interesting to newspaper people. In 1914 when *Tender Buttons* was published, which is the most obscure of all her books, she had newspaper reviews in *The Kansas City Star*, the Chicago papers, the San Francisco

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papers. The newspaper people could see that this was vastly entertaining. The more literary critics had lots of trouble with it. Creative writers could take it or leave it. And those who could take it used it slowly and in no obvious way, because it's very difficult to accept an influence from Gertrude Stein. But slowly, I think, she has become the dominant influence on American poetry and has taken the place there of Tom Eliot. She has influenced the poets who are now in their late forties: John Ashbery very much, I'm sure, and Kenneth Koch, and the late Frank O'Hara. Oh, certainly they were strongly influenced by Gertrude. You can find it in the diction, in the sound of the language, and in their approach to obscurity. There are other influences there, but I can read Gertrude in them.

T.S. ELIOT

Eliot looked like a young man from the advertisements of a good New York haberdasher. He was a typical young-man type. He wasn't quite as young as some of the others, wasn't quite as young as Scott Fitzgerald, but they both looked like Arrow collar ads. He never came much to Paris, but he was there once for some business reasons, and was with several people in Sylvia Beach's bookstore. He went to Gertrude's one evening. She used to talk about it afterwards. He asked her for a piece of poetry for his magazine. This was the fifteenth of November, so she wrote something called "The Fifteenth of November," and he said to somebody else afterwards, "Gertrude Stein is very good, but she's not for us." Gertrude was hard to sell.

Tom Eliot read too much. My fatal remark to Mary Butts got quoted quite a lot: "Between the idea and the realization comes always the shadow of his education."

MAX JACOB

Max was both a poet and a painter. He was Jewish, but he saw Jesus on the walls of his room one night, recognized a miracle, ran around to the local priest and said, "I've just seen

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Jesus, and it is a miracle. I want to be baptized." Well, the priest sort of laughed it off, and put him off, did nothing about it. But it worried Max because he knew it was for real, and five years later it happened again. He saw it again, on the walls of a movie house. This time he knew what to do. After being turned down by the priest he had investigated such matters. So he went to the Fathers of Zion, who are a religious order with the particular assignment of converting Jews. They knew what to do with him. They gave him all the proper lessons, and he was baptized. At the baptism, his old and close friend Pablo Picasso was his godfather.

PICASSO

Picasso, for all of his not being a very practicing Catholic, had remained a Spanish Catholic in perfectly good order, and could be a godfather. I knew Picasso very well. He actually did me a cover for a piece of music. At his house once I composed a musical portrait of him while he drew a portrait of me, which he never showed me. The idea of musical portraits was new to him. He asked how I did them. I answered that I drew them just as he would. I took paper, looked at my sitter, then let my pencil move—not doodling, but writing down as fast as possible what came to me. "Ah, yes," he said, "I understand. If you are in the room while I am working, whatever I do is automatically your portrait." The portrait I made of Picasso, called *Bugles and Birds*, was not a portrait of his work. I do not try to evoke visual art. In all my portraits only the sitter's presence is portrayed, not his appearance or his profession. Picasso's presence is also in my portrait of Dora Maar. When she came to pose, he came along. He was curious, he said, to see my flat and to watch me work again. He came into her portrait. I did not identify the intruder then, but only later came to realize that an assertive bass which makes its entry half way through the piece could only be Picasso. Dora Maar herself was not like that.

Picasso once said that he had known only a few musicians. There was Satie, of course. "He was delicious," he said. And

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he had been interested in Stravinsky originally, but later came to find the music "just a bird cage"—that's what he called it.

BACK TO MAX JACOB

During the war, Max took refuge in a Benedictine monastery in the country. The monks let him serve Mass, and he wrote books of devotion and poetry. But then they got a little afraid of the Germans, and they made him move out into a lodging house, where the Germans arrested him. In February they left him for two days on an open railway-station platform where he caught pneumonia, so that he died shortly after arriving at the German prison at Drancy. His friends have tended to consider him a martyr. I like the idea. Oh, Max was rather wonderful. He has not been translated into English until rather recently; about one-and-a-half books have appeared.

THE NEO-ROMANTICS

The chief contemporary movements, surrealism and neo-romanticism, were both romantic, though surrealism spoke more directly to the mind, neo-romanticism to the sensibilities. They were the two sides of the street. I was with the neo-romantics. They were less than a dozen painters, poets and musicians, chiefly represented by Bérard, Tchelichev, and Leonid and Eugene Berman. Their novelty consisted in their use of their personal sentiments as subject matter. Just as the surrealists for their themes sought out the irrational, the subversive, and the cruel, the subjects of the neo-romantics were predominantly humane and tender, the feelings you have when you let your mind alone. In politics they were conservative, in some cases even royalist, but their avoidance of political action was as strict as that of the surrealists. Their chief defenders were poets—Jean Cocteau, Max Jacob and Gertrude Stein. The neo-romantics were enjoying prestige and some prosperity. Their collectors in France were on the whole well-to-do. In America their work was bought only by intellectuals, chiefly the friends of Russell Hitchcock. They were young, and they would have had to be, for constant vibrancy is hard to sustain

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after thirty-five. But by 1938 Bérard had given up painting in oil for fashion drawing and stage design, and Eugene Berman had moved to New York, so that side of the street lost contact with the European picture market.

TWO SURREALIST POETS

Among the poets, which Tristan Tzara and Paul Éluard were, I liked Tzara much better. Tzara was chummy and witty and pleasant. Paul Éluard was a fairly well-to-do bourgeois Frenchman. He came to my house one day and started telling me what was right and wrong about all my pictures, as if he knew and I didn't. Maybe he did, but I didn't like being treated that way. And then I always get a little impatient with the poets who write about nothing but love. I would much rather they write about politics or history.

THERE WERE NO SURREALIST MUSICIANS BECAUSE

They did only what Breton told them to, and Breton himself had no musical ear.

SCULPTORS

I knew a lot of those modernist sculptors, like Giacometti and Zadkine and Duchamp and Alexander Calder and Arp. I liked them all. I don't know why I got on with sculptors. I think the reason for the sculptor-thing, and it still kind of works, is that by the time modern painting, with cubism as the center of it, had become a dealers' racket and a museum racket and an investors' racket—this was happening in the very early twenties—the life all went out of it. It became sort of dry in color and hard edged. It just wasn't any fun any more. But modernist sculpture, which was not a part of any sort of racket, was still fun. One of the most entertaining of the sculptors, the most entertaining for me always, was Arp. And I like Picasso's sculptures; they're much more fun than the pictures. Many of the cubist pictures are actually transcripts of sculptured objects that he had made previously.

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DUCHAMP

Marcel Duchamp was an old and longtime friend. A very special case too, and I think one similar to the composer Pierre Boulez, whom I'd met at the very end of the war. Both of them were the type of super-intellectualized Frenchman who dislikes other people's art so thoroughly that he has to make something his own way that would outdo theirs in some way. They outdid what they were rivalling in complexity. This kind of work . . . well, by the age of thirty the artist has made five absolutely unforgettable works of an extremely elaborate and complex composition. And then he can never relax. He can't be easy-going enough so that by forty he can create easily and be a great master, with freedom. He never acquires freedom because his working methods are so complex that he doesn't dare, or at least he's afraid that somebody will see something he shouldn't if he lets up on it.

PIERRE BOULEZ

In Boulez's case, the extreme complexity came out in a series of works beginning with the *Second Piano Sonata* and going through a string quartet in which he actually faced the problem of, and went through with, the complexities of multiple serialism, that is to say, submitting all the variables in music—not only pitches, but time-lengths, octave heights, methods of attack, loudnesses, everything that is variable in music—submitting those to serialization in the same way as twelve-tone composers put numbers on a row of tones and then always stated them in one piece in that same order. Well, this is so fantastically difficult to do and so complex to operate as a composition-method that it was practically never followed up. In his early days, he wrote a great deal of music; he's practically stopped writing music now. He does nothing but conduct.

MAN RAY

Man Ray and I got awfully thick at one point. I'd known him for twenty years, but we found ourselves standing in line at the American consulate in Biarritz in the summer of 1940,

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to get some kind of consulate validation for our intention, which was to move out of France. Then we went together to the German regiment to get permission to leave, and to the Spanish and Portuguese. We did all this together, and we actually left together. He was worried about his house in Saint-Germain, and his girlfriend—he had a black girlfriend living there, and he'd left her in charge of the house. He said, "Well, maybe I'll never see either of them again, I don't know." But he had kept his cameras. He was traveling light except for those. And so we went to Lisbon together and were there for two weeks waiting for a ship. Oh, we got very thick, and we remained sort of chummy after that, since we had gone through this exodus together. He was really more worried about it than I was, because he was Jewish. He knew he had to do it. I didn't have to do it but I just didn't have any more money and couldn't stay in France.

NOAH'S ARK

On the same ship were Dali and Gala; I'd known them before too. Man Ray had known them a great deal better on account of their surrealist connections. Dali was always on show. During the night he would think up jokes and tell them to you in the morning. We all saw one another every day on deck. Also the great movie-maker was there, René Clair. There were several other people that I knew on board—an American who'd been working for *Time* magazine in Rome, and whom I'd known in college, Arthur Sherrill. There we were, and we formed a sort of little island of more-or-less Parisians in this ship full of people from all sorts of places going to America. This was in August of 1940.

THE FRENCH

Oh, I did have fun in my long Paris residence, and I did consider myself to be inside France. I had friends in the academic community; I knew writers and judges, professors of all kinds and academicians, such as the Gillet family, who had five academicians, and the young ones were all young at

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the same time I was. The people with whom I was the most comfortable were always the high-class professionals and academics. That high powerful academic world in France is really quite something. But there is a certain quality of French life that is common to everyone—from the very rich and the very powerful clear down to the bohemians and criminals. Alice Toklas used to say that there are three kinds of French people, or three styles. There are the funereal ones—they're all very serious-minded and very strict, no humor. Then there are the casino-types, you know, like the people that are seen gambling in public and wearing jewelry and spending money. The official sour, dour Frenchman and the official gay Frenchman sort of divide the culture up between them, except for a narrow passage between the two, and that we called "good old France." That is full of common sense, no nonsense and a great deal of warmth and generosity—it makes the whole of France worth everything.

—compiled by Thomas Dilworth

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Kate Braverman is the author of four books of poetry and the novels, *Lithium for Medea*, *Palm Latitudes* and *Wonders of the West*. Her story, "Tall Tales from the Mekong Delta," was included in *Prize Stories 1992: The O. Henry Awards* and *The Best American Short Stories 1991*. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband and daughter.

Vikram Chandra was born in India. His novel, *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, will be published this fall by Penguin, India. He writes screenplays and computer programs and lives in Houston, Texas.

Andy Plattner lives in California, Kentucky. His stories have been published in *The Sewanee Review*, *Epoch* and *The Georgetown Review*.

Susan Power, a Standing Rock Sioux, is currently a Bunting Fellow at Harvard University. Her work has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Story* and *The Best American Short Stories 1993*. Her first novel, *The Grass Dancer*, will be published by G.P. Putnam in August.

POETRY

Rick Adang's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Another Chicago Magazine*, *The Nebraska Review* and *Western Humanities Review*. He lives in northern Indiana.

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Sarah Arvio, a 1992 recipient of an NEA Translators' Fellowship, has published poems and translations in *The New Yorker*, *The Yale Review*, *New Directions Anthology* and *The American Poetry Review*. She translates French and Spanish and works at the United Nations.

David Baker's new book of love poems and elegies, *After the Reunion*, will be published this summer by the University of Arkansas Press. He is an associate professor of English at Denison University and the consulting poetry editor of *The Kenyon Review*.

Michael Benedikt, a former poetry editor of *The Paris Review*, is the author of five books, including *The Badminton at Great Barrington*. He has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts and lives in New York City.

Laurel Blossom has won fellowships from the New York Foundation for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts. Her chapbook, *The Papers Said*, will be published this spring by Greenhouse Review Press.

George Bradley's most recent book of poems, *Of the Knowledge of Good and Evil*, was published in 1991. He has received the Witter Bynner Prize from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, and his work has appeared in many magazines and journals.

John Burt is an associate professor of English at Brandeis University and the author of two books, *The Way Down* and *Robert Penn Warren and American Idealism*.

Bernard Cooper was the 1991 recipient of the PEN/Hemingway Award for his essay collection, *Maps to Anywhere*. His work has appeared in *Harper's*, *The Kenyon Review* and *The Best American Essays 1988*.

Kjell Espmark, Sweden's leading expert on modernism in poetry, is a professor at the University of Stockholm and a member of the Swedish Academy. **Joan Tate** has translated Espmark's *Route Tournante*, of which the title poem appears in this issue.

Sybil Pittman Estess has been a teacher for thirty years, most recently at Houston Community College. She has published a collection of poems, *Seeing the Desert Green*, and co-edited (with Lloyd Schwartz) *Elizabeth Bishop and Her Art*.

James Laughlin's most recent books are his *Collected Poems* and a novella, *Angelica*. He is the publisher of New Directions.

Howard Levy's poetry has appeared in *Poetry* and *The Gettysburg Review*.

William Logan has won the Lavan Younger Poets Award from the Academy of American Poets and a citation for excellence in reviewing from the National Book Critics Circle. In 1994, David R. Godine will publish *Vain Empress*, a new volume of poetry, and *Reputations of the Tongue*, a collection of essays and reviews.

María Negroni is an Argentine poet who now lives in New York. Her poetry collections, published in Buenos Aires, include: *de tanto desolar*, *per/canta*, *La jaula bajo el trapo* and the forthcoming *Islandia*. **Anne Twitty**'s transla-

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tions have appeared in *American Voice* and *The Literary Review*. Her translation of Negroni's *La jaula bajo el trapo (Cage beneath the Cloth)* will be published by Station Hill Press in 1994.

Alan Michael Parker is the editor of *The Routledge Anthology of Cross-Gendered Verse*, to be published this year by Routledge Books. His poems have appeared in many magazines and journals, including *Antaeus*, *Boulevard*, *The New Republic* and *The New Yorker*.

Octavio Paz's most recent books in English translation are *The Collected Poems 1957–1987*, *Convergences* and *Essays on Mexican Art*. Forthcoming from Harcourt Brace is *The Double Flame: Eroticism and Sexuality*. **Eliot Weinberger** is the editor and translator of *The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz*. His most recent books are *Outside Stories*, a collection of essays, and the anthology *American Poetry Since 1950: Innovators and Outsiders*.

Molly Peacock is the author of the poetry collections *And Live Apart*, *Raw Heaven* and *Take Heart*. She lives in New York City and London, Ontario and serves as president of the Poetry Society of America.

Burton Raffel is the translator of a new edition of Balzac's *Le Père Goriot*, just published by Norton. His *The Art of Translating Prose* is forthcoming from Penn State University Press.

S.X. Rosenstock's first published poem appears in this issue. More poems will appear in a forthcoming issue of *Western Humanities Review*.

Tony Sanders's first poetry collection, *Partial Eclipse*, will be released by the University of North Texas Press next summer. He has work forthcoming in *The Yale Review* and *Confrontation*.

Stephen Sandy's latest books are *Thanksgiving over the Water* and *Man in the Open Air*. His verse translation of Seneca's *Hercules Oetaeus, A Cloak for Hercules*, will be published later this year by Johns Hopkins University Press. He teaches at Bennington and is currently the McGee Professor of Writing at Davidson College.

Henry Sloss lives in Maryland where he teaches at a community college.

Tomas Tranströmer, Sweden's foremost poet, published the first of his nine volumes of poetry when he was twenty-three years old. His translator is **Joanna Bankier**.

INTERVIEWS

Alexandra Eyle (W.D. Snodgrass interview) is a freelance journalist living in Syracuse, New York. She recently published a book on timber baron Charles Pack.

Robert Faggen (Ken Kesey interview) is an assistant professor of literature at Claremont McKenna College. His book *Robert Frost and the Challenge of Darwin* is forthcoming from University of Michigan Press. He is currently at work on a book about Czeslaw Milosz for MacMillan.

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FEATURES

Walter Channing is a sculptor and a general partner of the CW Group, a venture capital firm specializing in the health care field.
Thomas Dilworth (Virgil Thomson feature) teaches English and comparative literature at the University of Windsor and is a Kilham Fellow. He received the British Council Prize in the Humanities for his volume *The Shape of Meaning in the Poetry of David Jones*.
W.D. Snodgrass, the subject of a Writers-at-Work interview in this issue, is the author, most recently, of *Each in his Season*, published by BOA Editions.

ART

Louise Bourgeois was born in France and lives in New York City. Her work can be found in most international museum collections. She is represented by the Robert Miller Gallery in New York.
James Casebere was born in Lansing, Michigan in 1953. He currently lives and works in New York City. The portfolio of silver prints in this issue is reproduced by courtesy of Michael Klein, Inc. of New York.
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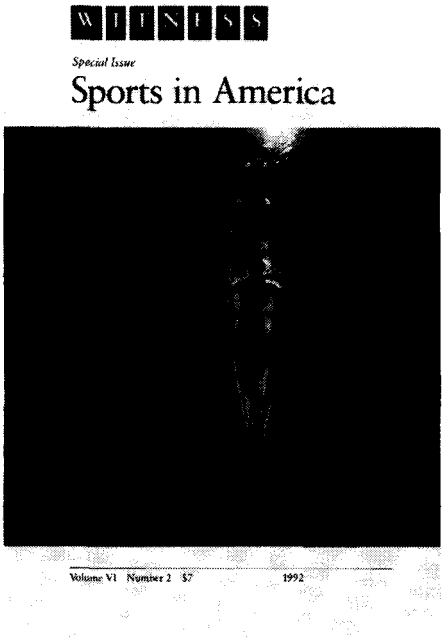

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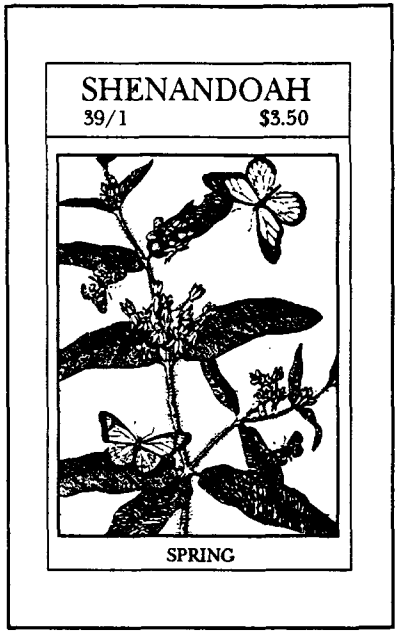

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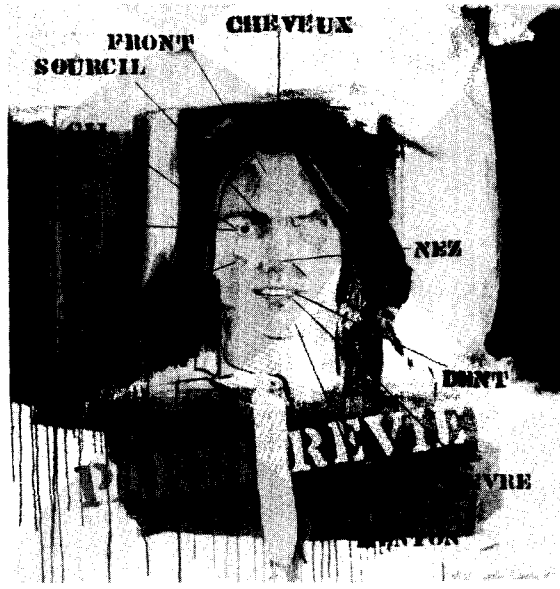

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